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The Tysons

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MAY SINCLAIR

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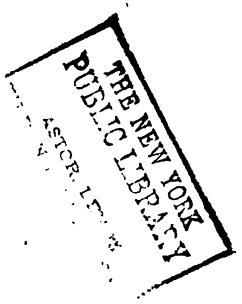
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Mrs. NEVILL TYSON.

THE TYSONS

(*MR. AND MRS. NEVILL TYSON*)

BY

MAY SINCLAIR

AUTHOR OF

"THE DIVINE FIRE,"

ETC

NEW YORK

B. W. DODGE & COMPANY

1906

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THE TYSONS

CHAPTER I

MR. NEVILL TYSON

THERE were only two or three houses in Drayton Parva where Mr. and Mrs. Nevill Tyson were received. A thrill of guilty expectation used to go through the room when they were announced, and people watched them with a fearful interest, as if they were the actors in some enthralling but forbidden drama.

Perhaps, if she had been tried by a jury of her peers—but Mrs. Nevill Tyson had no peers in Drayton Parva. She was tried by an invisible and incorruptible jury of ideas in Miss Batchelor's head. Opinion sways all things in Drayton Parva, and Miss Batchelor swayed opinion.

As for Mr. Nevill Tyson, he had dropped

into Leicestershire from heaven knows where, and was understood to be more or less on his trial. Nobody knew anything about him, except that he was a nephew of old Tyson of Thorneytoft, and had come in for the property. Nobody cared much for old Tyson of Thorneytoft; he was not exactly —well, no matter, he was very respectable and he was dead, which entitled him to a little consideration. And as Mr. Nevill Tyson was an unmarried man in those days he naturally attracted some attention on his own account, as well as for the sake of the very respectable old man, his uncle.

He was first seen at a dinner at the Morleys. Somebody else happened to be the guest of the evening, and somebody else took Lady Morley in to dinner. Tyson took Miss Batchelor, and I don't think he quite liked it. Miss Batchelor was clever—frightfully clever—but she never showed up well in public; she had a nervous manner, and a way of looking at you as if you were some curious animal that she would like to pat if she were

perfectly sure you were not dangerous. And when you were about to take compassion on her shyness, she startled you with a sudden lapse into self-possession. I can see her now looking at Tyson over the frills on her shoulder, with her thin crooked little mouth smiling slightly. She might well look, for Nevill Tyson's appearance was remarkable. He might have been any age between twenty-five and forty; as a matter of fact he was thirty-six. England had made him florid and Anglo-Saxon, but the tropics had bleached his skin and dried his straw-colored hair till it looked like hay. His figure was short and rather clumsily built, but it had a certain strength and determination; so had his face. The determination was not expressly stated by any single feature—the mouth was not what you would call firm, and the chin retreated ever so slightly in a heavy curve—but it was somehow implied by the whole. He gave you the idea of iron battered in all the arsenals of the world. Miss Batchelor wondered what he would have to say for himself.

He said very little, and looked at nobody, until some casual remark of his made somebody look at him. Then he began to talk, laconically at first, and finally with great fluency. It was all about himself, and everybody listened. He proved a good talker, as a man ought to be who has knocked about four continents and seen strange men and stranger women. You could tell that Miss Batchelor was interested, for she had turned round in her chair now and was looking him straight in the face. It seemed that he had worked his way out to Bombay and back again. He had been reporter to half-a-dozen provincial papers. He had been tutor to Somebody's son at some place not specified. He had tried his hand at comic journalism in London and at cattle-driving in Texas, and had been half-way to glory as a captain of irregulars in the Soudanese war. No, nobody was more surprised than himself when that mystic old man left him Thorneytoft. He thought he had chucked civilization for good. For good? But—after his exciting

life—wouldn't he find civilization a little—dull? (Miss Batchelor had a way of pointing her sentences as if she were speaking in parables.) Not in the country, there was hardly enough of it there, and he had never tried being a country gentleman before; he rather wanted to see what it was like. Wouldn't it be a little hard, if he had never—? He thought not. The first thing he should do would be to get some decent hunters.

Hunters were all very well, but had he no hobbies? No, he had not; the *bona fide* country gentleman never had hobbies. They were kept by amateur gentlemen retired from business to the suburbs. Here Sir Peter observed that talking of hobbies, old Mr. Tyson had a perfect—er—mania for orchids; he spent the best part of his life in his greenhouse. Mr. Nevill Tyson thought he would rather spend his in Calcutta at once.

A dark lean man who had arrived with Tyson was seen to smile frequently during the above dialogue. Miss Batchelor caught him doing it and turned to Tyson. "Captain

Stanistreet seemed rather amused at the notion of your being a fine old country gentleman."

"Stanistreet? I daresay. But he knows nothing about it, I assure you. He has the soul of a cabman. He measures everything by its distance from Charing Cross."

"I see. And you—are all for green fields and idyllic simplicity?"

He bowed, as much as to say, "I am, if you say so."

Miss Batchelor became instantly self-possessed.

"You won't like it. Nothing happens here; nothing ever will happen. You will be dreadfully bored."

"If I am bored I shall get something to do. I shall dissipate myself in a bland parochial patriotism. I can feel it coming on already. When I once get my feet on a platform I shall let myself go."

"Do. You'll astonish our simple Arcadian farmers. Nothing but good old Tory melo-

drama goes down here. Are you equal to that?"

"Oh yes. I'm terrific in Tory melodrama. I shall bring down the house."

She turned a curious scrutinizing look on him.

"Yes," said she, "you'll bring down the house—like Samson among the Philistines."

He returned her look with interest. "I should immensely like to know," said he, "what you go in for. I'm sure you go in for something."

She looked at her plate. "Well, I dabble a little in psychology."

"Oh!" There was a moment's silence. "Psychology is a large order," said Tyson, presently.

"Yes, if you go in deep. I'm not deep. I'm perfectly happy when I've got hold of the first principles. It sounds dreadfully superficial, but I'm not interested in anything but principles."

"I'm sorry to hear it, for in that case you won't be interested in me."

She laughed nervously. She was accustomed to be rallied on her attainments, but never quite after this fashion.

"Why not?"

"Because I haven't any principles."

She bent her brows; but her eyes were smiling under her frown.

"You really mustn't say these things here. We are so dreadfully literal. We might take you at your word."

Tyson smiled, showing his rather prominent teeth unpleasantly.

"I wish," said she, "I knew what you think a country gentleman's duties really are."

"Do you? They are three. To hunt hard; to shoot straight; and to go to church."

"I hope you will perform them—all."

"I shall—all. No—on second thoughts I draw the line at going to church. It's all very well if you've got a private chapel, or an easy chair in the chancel, or a family vault you can sit in. But I detest these modern arrangements; I object to be stuck in a tight position between two boards, with my feet in

somebody else's hat, and somebody else's feet in mine, and to have people breathing down my collar and hissing and yelling alternately in my ear."

Again Miss Batchelor drew her eyebrows together in a friendly frown of warning. She liked the cosmopolitan Tyson and his reckless speech, and she had her own reasons for wishing him to make a good impression. But her hints had roused in him the instinct of antagonism, and he went on more recklessly than before. "No; you are perfectly wrong. I'm not an interesting atheist. I have the most beautiful child-like faith in——"

"The God who was clever enough to make Mr. Nevill Tyson?" said Miss Batchelor, very softly. She had felt the antagonism, and resented it.

At this point Sir Peter came down with one of those tremendous platitudes that roll conversation out flat. That was his notion of the duty of a host, to rush in and change the subject just as it was getting exciting.

The old gentleman had destroyed many a promising topic in this way, under the impression that he was saving a situation.

"You'll be bored to death—I give you six months," were Miss Batchelor's parting words, murmured aside over her shoulder.

On their way home Stanistreet congratulated Tyson.

"By Jove! you've fallen on your feet, Tyson. They tell me Miss Batchelor is interested in you."

"I am not interested in Miss Batchelor. Who is she?"

"She is only Miss Batchelor of Meriden Court—the richest land-owner in Leicestershire."

"Good heavens! Why doesn't somebody marry her?"

"Miss Batchelor, they say, is much too clever for that."

"Is she?" And Tyson laughed, a little brutally.

. . . . . .

Of course everybody called on the eccentric

newcomer when they saw that the Morleys had taken him up. But before they had time to ask each other to meet him, Mr. Nevill Tyson had imported his own society from Putney or Bohemia, or some of those places.

That was his first mistake.

The next was his marriage. In fact, for a man in Tyson's insecure position, it was more than a mistake; it was madness. He ought to have married some powerful woman like Miss Batchelor, a woman with ideas and money and character, to say nothing of an inviolable social reputation. But men like Tyson never do what they ought. Miss Batchelor was clever, and he hated clever women. So he married Molly Wilcox. Molly Wilcox was nineteen; she had had no education, and, what was infinitely worse, she had a vulgar mother. And as Mr. Wilcox might be considered a negligible quantity, the chances were that she would take after her mother.

The mystery was how Tyson ever came to know these people. Mr. Wilcox was a student and an invalid; moreover, he was excessively

morose. He would not have called, and even Mrs. Wilcox could hardly have called without him. Scandal-mongers said that Tyson struck up an acquaintance with the girl and her mother in a railway carriage somewhere between Drayton and St. Pancras, and had called on the strength of it. It did great credit to his imagination that he could see the makings of Mrs. Nevill Tyson in Molly Wilcox, dressed according to her mother's taste, with that hair of hers all curling into her eyes in front, and rumpled up anyhow behind. However, though I daresay his introduction was a little informal and obscure, there was every reason for the intimacy that followed. The Wilcoxes were unpopular; so, by this time, was Tyson. In cultivating him Mrs. Wilcox felt that she was doing something particularly esoteric and rather daring. She had taken a line. She loved everything that was a little flagrant, a little out of the common, and a little dubious. To a lady with these tastes Tyson was a godsend; he more than satisfied

her desire for magnificence and mystery. For economical reasons Mrs. Wilcox's body was compelled to live with Mr. Wilcox in a cottage in Drayton Parva; but her soul dwelt continually in a side-street in Bayswater, in a region haunted by the shabby-refined, the shabby-smart, and the innocently risky. Mrs. Wilcox, I maintain, was as innocent as the babe unborn. She believed that not only is this world the best of all possible worlds, but that Bayswater is the best of all possible places in it. So, though she was quite deaf to many of the chords in Tyson's being, her soul responded instantly to the note of "town." And when she discovered that Tyson had met and, what is more, dined with her old friends the Blundell-Thompsons "of Bombay," her satisfaction knew no bounds.

At any rate, Tyson had not been very long at Thorneytoft before Mrs. Wilcox found herself arguing with Mr. Wilcox. She herself was impervious to argument, and owing to her rapt inconsequence it was generally difficult to tell what she would be at. This

time, however, she seemed to be defending Mr. Nevill Tyson from unkind aspersions.

"Of course, all young men are likely to be wild; but Mr. Tyson is not a young man."

"Therefore Mr. Tyson is not likely to be wild. Do you know you are guilty of the fallacy known to logicians as illicit process of the major?"

Mrs. Wilcox looked up in some alarm. The term suggested anything from a court-martial to some vague impropriety.

"The Major? Major who?" she inquired, deftly recovering her mental balance. "Where is he?"

"Somewhere about the premises, I fancy," said Mr. Wilcox, dryly. When all argument failed he had still a chastened delight in mystifying the poor lady.

Mrs. Wilcox looked out of the window. "Oh, I see; you mean Captain Stanistreet." She smiled; for where Captain Stanistreet was Mr. Nevill Tyson was not very far away. Moreover, she was glad that she had on her nice ultramarine tea-gown with the green

moiré front. (They were wearing those colors in town that season.)

At Thorneytoft a few hours later Stanistreet's tongue was running on as usual, when Tyson pulled him up with a jerk. "Hold hard. Do you know you're talking about the future Mrs. Nevill Tyson?"

Stanistreet tried to keep calm, for he was poised on his waist across the edge of the billiard-table. As it was, he lost his balance at the critical moment, and it ruined his stroke. He looked at the cloth, then at his cue, with the puzzled air which people generally affect in these circumstances.

"Great Scott!" said he, "how did I manage that?"

The exclamation may or may not have referred to the stroke.

Tyson looked at his friend with a smile which suggested that he expected adverse criticism, and was prepared to deal temperately with it.

"Why not?" said he.

Stanistreet, however, said nothing. He

was absorbed in chalking the end of his cue. His silence gave Tyson no chance; it left too much to the imagination.

"Have you any objection?"

"Well, isn't the lady a little young for a fine old country gentleman like yourself?"

Tyson's small blue eyes twinkled, for he prided himself on being able to take a joke at his own expense. Still it was not exactly kind of Stanistreet to remind him of his mushroom growth.

"Come," said Stanistreet, "you are a gentleman, you know. At any rate, you're about the only fellow in these parts who can stand a frock-coat and topper—that's the test. I saw Morley, your big man, going into church yesterday, and he looked as if he'd just sneaked out of the City on a 'bus. But you always knew how to dress yourself. The instinct is hereditary."

Louis had just made a brilliant series of cannons, and was marking fifty to his score. If he had not been so absorbed in his game, he would have seen that Tyson was angry;

and Tyson when he was angry was not at all nice to see.

He made himself very stiff as he answered, "Whether I'm a gentleman or not I can't say. It's an abstruse question. But I've got the girl on my side, which is a point in my favor; I have the weighty support of my mamma-in-law elect; and—the prejudices of papa I shall subdue by degrees."

"By degrees? What degrees?" Again the question was unkind. It referred to a phase of Tyson's university career which he least liked to look back upon.

"And how about Mrs. Hathaway?"

"Damn Mrs. Hathaway," said Tyson.

"Poor lady, isn't she sufficiently damned already?"

The twinkle came back into Tyson's eyes, but there was gloom in the rest of his face. The twinkle was lost upon Stanistreet. He knew too much; and the awkward thing was that Tyson never could tell exactly how much he knew. So he wisely dropped the subject.

Stanistreet certainly knew a great deal;

but he was the last man in the world to make a pedantic display of his knowledge; and Mr. Wilcox's prejudices remained the only obstacle to Tyson's marriage. It was one iron will against another, and the battle was long. Mr. Wilcox had the advantage of position. He simply retreated into his library as into a fortified camp, intrenching himself behind a barricade of books, and refusing to skirmish with the enemy in the open. And to every assault made by his family he replied with a violent fit of coughing. A well-authenticated lung-disease is a formidable weapon in domestic warfare.

At last he yielded. Not to time, nor yet to Tyson, nor yet to his wife's logic, but to the importunities of his lung-disease. Other causes may have contributed; he was a man of obstinate affections, and he had loved his daughter.

It was considered right that the faults of the dead (his unreasonable obstinacy, for instance) should be forgiven and forgotten. Death seemed to have made Mrs. Wilcox

suddenly familiar with her incomprehensible husband. She was convinced that whatever he had thought of it on earth, in heaven, purged from all mortal weakness, Mr. Wilcox was taking a very different view of Molly's engagement.

He died in March, and Tyson married Molly in the following May. The bride is reported to have summed up the case thus: "Bad? I daresay he is. I'm not marrying him because he is good; I'm marrying him because he's delightful. And I'm every bit as bad as he is, if they only knew."

It was Mrs. Nevill Tyson's genius for this sort of remark that helped to make her reputation later on.

CHAPTER II

MRS. NEVILL TYSON

Tyson took his wife abroad for six months to finish her education (as if to be Tyson's wife was not education enough for any woman!); and Drayton Parva forgot about them for a time.

In fact, nobody had fully realized the existence of Molly Wilcox till she burst on them as Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

It was the first appearance of the bride and bridegroom on their return from their long honeymoon. The rector was giving an "At Home" (tentatively) in their honor; and a great many people had accepted, feeling that a very interesting social experiment was about to be made. Everybody remembers how Mrs. Nevill Tyson fluttered down into that party of thirty women to eleven men, in

an absurd frock, and with a still more absurd air of assured welcome. Poor little woman! Her comings and goings from one Continental watering-place to another had been the progress of a triumphant divinity; where she found an hotel she left a temple. I sometimes think, too, that little look of expectant gladness may have been due to the feeling that the Rectory was in England, and England was home. She was dressed in the most perfect Parisian fashion, from the crown of her fur toque to the tips of her little shoes; but she had never learned to speak three words of French correctly. She informed everybody of the fact that afternoon, laughing with the keenest enjoyment of her remarkable stupidity; it seemed that her *rôle* was to be remarkable in everything. However that may have been, in less than half an hour seven out of those eleven men were gathered round her chair in the corner; two out of the seven were the rector and Sir Peter Morley, and Mrs. Nevill Tyson was talking to all of them at once.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson—she was an illusion and a distraction from head to foot; her beauty made a promise to the senses and broke it to the intellect. Coil upon coil, and curl upon curl of dark hair, the dark eyes of some ruminant animal, a little frivolous curve in an intelligent nose, a lower jaw like a boy's, the full white throat of a woman, and the mouth and cheeks of a child just waked from sleep. Tyson had escaped one misfortune that had been prophesied for him. His wife was not vulgar. She sat at her ease (much more at her ease than Miss Batchelor), and chattered away about her honeymoon, her bad French, the places she had been to, the people she had seen, and all without any consciousness of her delightful self. Now it was a continuous stream of minute talk, growing shallower and shallower as it spread over a larger surface; and now her mind had hardly settled on its subject before it was off and away again like a butterfly. There was one advantage in this excessive lightness of touch, that it left great things as it found them, for great things lay

lightly on her soul. She told everybody she had been to Rome; but imagination simply refused to picture Mrs. Nevill Tyson in Rome. Her presence in the Eternal City seemed something less than her footprint in its dust or her shadow on its walls. Nothing is more irritating than to have your dream of a place destroyed by the light-hearted gabble of some idiot who has seen it; but Mrs. Nevill Tyson spared your dreams. The most delicate ideal would have been undisturbed by the soft sweep of her generalities, or the graceful flight of her fancy from the matter in hand.

"There are a great many beautiful statues in the Vatican," said Sir Peter in his dream.

"Oh, no end. And, talking of beautiful statues, we were introduced to the most beautiful woman in Rome, the Countess—Countess—Countess—Nevill, what *was* that woman's name? Oh—I forget her name, but she was the loveliest woman I ever saw in my life. Everybody was in love with her—down on their knees groveling, you couldn't help it. Fancy, she was engaged to ten people at once!

I suppose she had ten engagement rings—one for each finger, one for each man. I should never have known which was which. But oh! I oughtn't to have told you. My husband said I wasn't to talk about her. I don't see why—everybody was talking about her!"

There was a chorus of protestation.

"And why shouldn't they talk about her, and why shouldn't she be engaged to ten gentlemen at once? The more the merrier."

"And you haven't told us the lady's name, so we're none the wiser."

"I forgot it. But it would have been all the same if I hadn't. I never can remember not to tell things. Oh—Countess—Poli—Polidori! There—you see. My husband says I'm the soul of indiscretion."

There was a sudden silence. Mrs. Nevill Tyson's last sentence seemed to detach itself and float about the room, and Miss Batchelor perceived with a pang of pleasure that if Tyson's wife was not vulgar she was an arrant fool.

"I suppose you visited all the great cathe-

drals?" said the Rector. Perhaps he wished to change the subject; perhaps he felt that by talking about cathedrals to Mrs. Nevill Tyson he was giving a serious, not to say sacerdotal, character to a frivolous occupation.

"Well, only St. Peter's and the one at Milan."

"And which did you prefer? I am told that St. Peter's is very like our own St. Paul's —or I should say St. Paul's——"

"Oh, please don't ask me! I know no more than the man in the moon—I mean the man in the honeymoon" (that joke was Tyson's), "and a lot *he* knows about it. There's the man in the honeymoon," she explained, nodding merrily in her husband's direction.

Meanwhile Tyson was making himself agreeable to Miss Batchelor. And this is how he did it.

"I hear, Miss Batchelor, that you are a lady of genius."

There was a rumor that Miss Batchelor was engaged on a work of fiction, which in-

deed may have been true, though not exactly in the sense intended.

"Indeed; who told you that?"

"Scandal. But I never listen to scandal, and I didn't believe it."

"I don't suppose you believe that a woman could be a genius."

"No? I have seen women who were geniuses, before now; but in every instance it meant—I shall hurt your feelings if I tell you what it meant."

"Not at all. I have no feelings."

"It meant either devilry or disease."

Tyson's eyes twinkled wickedly as he stroked his blonde mustache. He felt a diabolical delight in teasing Miss Batchelor. There was a time when Miss Batchelor had admired Tyson. He was not handsome; but his face had character, and she liked character. Now she hated him and his face and everything belonging to him, his wife included. But there was no denying that he was clever, cleverer than any man she had ever met in her life.

"Even a great intellect"—here Tyson looked hard at Miss Batchelor, and her faded nervous face seemed to shrink under the look —"is a great misfortune—to a woman. Look at my wife now. She has about as much intellect as a guinea-pig, and the consequence is she is not only happy herself, but a cause of happiness to others. There—see!"

Miss Batchelor saw. She saw Sir Peter Morley contending with the rector for the honor of handing Mrs. Nevill Tyson her tea. They were joined by Stanistreet. Yes, Stanistreet. The rector seemed to have drawn the line nowhere that day. There was no mistaking the tall figure, alert and vigorous, the lean dark face, a little eager, a little hard. And that very clever woman Miss Batchelor sat hungry and thirsty—very hungry and very thirsty—and Tyson stood behind her stroking his mustache. He was not looking at her now, nor thinking of her. He was contemplating that adorable piece of folly, his wife.

CHAPTER III

MR. AND MRS. NEVILL TYSON AT HOME

PERHAPS it was well that Mrs. Nevill Tyson took things so lightly, otherwise she might have been somewhat oppressed by her surroundings at Thorneytoft. That hideous old barrack stared with all the uncompromising truculence of bare white stone on nature that smiled agreeably round it in lawn and underwood. Old Tyson had bought the house as it stood from an impecunious nobleman, supplying its deficiencies according to his own very respectable fancy. The result was a little startling. Worm-eaten oak was flanked by mahogany veneer, brocade and tapestry were eked out with horse-hair and green rep, gules and azure from the stained-glass lozenge lattices were reflected in a hundred twinkling, dangling lusters; and you came upon lions

rampant in a wilderness of wax-flowers. What with antique heraldry and utilitarian furniture, you would have said there was no place there for anything so frivolously pretty as Mrs. Nevill Tyson; unless, indeed, her figure served to give the finishing touch to the ridiculous medley.

The sight of Thorneytoft would have taken the heart out of Mrs. Wilcox if anything could. Mrs. Wilcox herself looked remarkably crisp and fresh and cheerful in her widow's dress. Tyson rather liked Mrs. Wilcox than otherwise (perhaps because she was a little afraid of him and showed it); he noticed with relief that his mother-in-law was beginning to look almost like a lady, and he attributed this pleasing effect to the fact that she was now unable to commit any of her former atrocities of color. He respected her, too, for wearing her weeds with an air of genial worldliness. There was something about Mrs. Wilcox that evaded the touch of sorrow; but from certain things—food, clothes, furniture—she seemed to catch, as it

were, the sense of tears, suggestions of the human tragedy. She was peculiarly sensitive to interiors, and a drawing-room "without any of the little refinements and luxuries, you know—not so much as a flower-pot or a basket-table"—weighed heavily on her happy soul. Needless to say she had never dreamed that Nevill would let the house remain in its present state; her intellect could never have grasped so melancholy a possibility, and the fact was somewhat unsettling to her faith in Nevill Tyson. "Isn't it—for a young bride, you know—just a little—a little *triste*?" And being more than a little afraid of her son-in-law, she waved her hands to give an inoffensive vagueness to her idea. Tyson said he didn't care to spend money on a place like Thorneytoft; he didn't know how long he would stay in it; he never stayed anywhere long; he was a pilgrim and a stranger, a sort of cosmopolitan Cain, and he might go abroad again, or he might take a flat in town for the season. And at the mention of a flat in town all Mrs. Wilcox's beautiful beliefs

came back to her unimpaired. A flat in town, and a house in the country that you can afford to look down upon—what more could you desire?

Mrs. Nevill Tyson did not take the furniture very seriously. For quite three days after her arrival she was content to sit in that very respectable drawing-room, waiting for the callers who never came. She could not have taken the callers very seriously either (what *did* Mrs. Nevill Tyson take seriously, I should like to know?), or else, surely she would have had some little regard for appearances; she would never have risked being caught at four o'clock in the afternoon sitting on Tyson's knee, doing all sorts of absurd things to his face. First, she stroked his hair straight down over his forehead, which had a singularly brutalizing effect, so that she was obliged to push it back again and make it all neat with one of the little tortoise-shell combs that kept her own curls in order. Then she lifted up his mustache till the lip curled in a dreadful mechanical smile, show-

ing a slightly crooked, slightly prominent tooth.

"Oh, what an ugly tooth!" said Mrs. Nevill Tyson; and she let the lip fall again like a curtain. "How could I marry a man with a tooth like that? Do you know, poor papa used to say you were just like Phorc—Phorc—something with a fork in it."

"Phorcyas?"

"Yes. How clever you are! Who *was* Phorc-y-as?" Mrs. Nevill Tyson made a face over the word.

"It's another name for Mephistopheles." (Tyson knew his Goethe better than his classics.)

"And Mephistopheles is another name for —the devil! Oh!" She took the tips of his ears with the tips of her fingers and held his head straight while she stared into his eyes. "Look me straight in the face now. No blinking. Are you the devil, I wonder?" She put her head on one side as if she were considering him judicially from an entirely new point

of view. "I wonder why papa didn't like you?"

"He didn't think me good enough for his little girl, and he was quite right there."

"He didn't mind so much when I got engaged to Willie Payne. He said we were admirably suited to each other. That was because Willie was a fool. Oh—I forgot you didn't know!"

"Ah, I know now. And how many more, Mrs. Molly?"

"No more—only you. And Willie doesn't count. It was ages ago, when I was at school. Look here." She pushed back the ruffles of her sleeve and showed him a little livid mark running across the back of her hand. "Did I ever tell you what that meant? It means that they shoved Willie's letters into the big fireplace—with the tongs—and that *I* stuck my hand between the bars and pulled them out."

"I say—you must have been rather gone on Willie, you know."

"No. I didn't like him much. But I *loved*

his letters." Mrs. Nevill Tyson looked at the tips of her little shoes, and Mr. Nevill Tyson looked at her.

"So Willie doesn't count, doesn't he?"

"No. He was a fool. He never did anything. Nevill, what did father think you'd done?"

"I really cannot say. Nothing to deserve you, I suppose."

"Rubbish! I know all that. But he said there was something, and he wouldn't tell me what. Anyhow, you didn't do it, did you?"

"Probably not."

"Come, I think you might tell me when I've confessed all my little sins to you." Mrs. Nevill Tyson was persistent, not because she in the least wanted to know, but because nobody likes being beaten.

"I don't know what the dear old pater was driving at. I don't suppose he knew himself. He was a scholar, not a man of the world. He could read any Greek poet, I daresay, who was dead enough and dull enough; but when a real live Englishman walked into his

study, it seemed to put him out somehow. He didn't like me, and he showed it. All the same, I think I could have made him like me if he'd given me a chance. I don't suppose he does me any injustice now."

"No. He knew an awful lot about those stupid old Greeks and Romans and people, but I don't think he knew much about you. I expect he made it up to frighten mother. That reminds me, what *do* you think Miss Batchelor says about you? She told mother that it was a pity you hadn't any profession —every man ought to have a profession— keep you out of mischief. I wasn't going to have her talking like that about *my* husband —the impudent thing!—so I just stopped her yesterday in Moxon's shop and told her you had a profession. I led up to it so neatly, you can't think. I said you were going to be a barrister or a judge or something."

"A judge? That's rather a large order. But you know you mustn't tell stories, you little minx. Miss Batchelor's too clever to take all that in."

"Well, but it's true. You *are* going to be a barrister, and everybody knows that barristers grow into judges, if you feed them properly."

"But I haven't the remotest intention of being a barrister. How did you get hold of that notion?"

"Oh, I knew it all along. Papa said so."

"You must have been mistaken."

"Not a bit. I'll tell you exactly what he said. I heard him talking about it to mother in the library. I wasn't listening, you know. I—I heard your name, and I couldn't help it. He said he expected to see you figuring in the law courts some of these days—Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Division."

Tyson rose, putting her down from his knee as if she had been a baby.

"I hope you didn't tell Miss Batchelor that?"

"Yes, I did though—rather!"

He smiled in spite of himself. "What did she do?"

"Oh, she just stared—over her shoulder; you know her way."

"Look here, Molly, you must *not* go about saying that sort of thing. People here don't understand it; they'll only think——"

"What?"

"Never mind what they'll think. The world is chock-full of wickedness, my child. But if half the people we meet are sinners, the other half are fools. I never knew any one yet who wasn't one or the other. So don't think about what they think, but mind what you say. See?"

"I'm sorry." She had come softly up to the window where he stood; and now she was rubbing his sleeve with one side of her face and smiling with the other.

He stroked her hair.

"All right. Don't do it again, that's all."

"I won't—if you'll only tell me one thing. Were you ever engaged to anybody but me?"

"No; I was never engaged to anybody but you."

"Then you were never in love with ten

gentlemen at once like the Countess Pol——"

His answer was cut short by the entrance of Sir Peter Morley, followed by Captain Stanistreet.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST STONE

Tyson was much flattered by the rumor that Sir Peter Morley had pronounced his wife to be "the loveliest woman in Leicestershire"; for Lady Morley herself was a sufficiently splendid type, with her austere Puritan beauty. As for the rector, it was considered that his admiration of Mrs. Nevill Tyson somewhat stultified his utterances in the pulpit.

It is not always well for a woman when the judgment of the other sex reverses that of her own. It was not well for Mrs. Nevill Tyson to be told that she had fascinated Sir Peter Morley and spoiled the rector's sermons; it was not well for her to be worshipped (collectively) by the riff-raff that swarmed about Thorneytoft at Tyson's invitation; but any of these things were better

than for her to be left, as she frequently was, to the unmixed society of Captain Stanistreet. He had a reputation. Tyson thought nothing of going up to town for the week-end and leaving Louis to entertain his wife in his absence. To do him justice, this neglect was at first merely a device by which he heightened the luxury of possession. In his own choice phrase, he "liked to give a mare a loose rein when he knew her paces." It was all right. He knew Molly, and if he did not, Stanistreet knew him. But these things were subtleties which Drayton Parva did not understand, and naturally enough it began to avoid the Tysons because of them.

Apparently Mrs. Nevill Tyson liked Stanistreet. She liked his humorous dark face and his courteous manners; above all, she liked that air of profound interest with which he listened to everything that she had to say; it made it easy for her to chatter to him as she chattered to nobody else, except (presumably) her husband. As for Stanistreet, try as he would (and he tried a great deal), he

could not make Mrs. Nevill Tyson out. Day after day Mrs. Nevill Tyson, in amazing garments, sat and prattled to him in the dog-cart, while Tyson followed the hounds; yet for the life of him he could not tell whether she was really very infantile or only very deep. You see she was Tyson's wife. It must be said she gave him every opportunity for clearing his ideas on the subject, and if he did not know, other people might be allowed to make mistakes. And when he came to stay at Thorneytoft for weeks at a time, familiarity with the little creature's moods only complicated the problem.

It was about the middle of February, and Stanistreet had been down for a fortnight's hunting, when, in the morning of his last day, Tyson announced his intention of going up to town with him to-morrow. He might be away for three weeks or a month altogether; it depended upon whether he enjoyed himself sufficiently.

Stanistreet, who was looking at Mrs. Nevill Tyson at the time, saw the smile and the

color die out of her face; her beauty seemed to suffer a shade, a momentary eclipse. She began to drink tea (they were at breakfast) with an air of abstraction too precipitate to be quite convincing.

"Moll," said Tyson, "if you're going to this meet, you'd better run upstairs and put your things on."

"I don't want to go to any meets."

"Why not?"

"Because—I—I don't like to see other women riding."

"Bless her little heart!" (Tyson was particularly affectionate this morning) "she's never had a bridle in her ridiculous hands, and she talks about 'other women riding.'"

"Because I want to ride, and you won't let me, and I'm jealous."

"Well, if you mayn't ride with me, you may drive with Stanistreet."

"*I* may drive Captain Stanistreet?"

"Certainly not; Captain Stanistreet may drive you."

"We'll see about that," said Mrs. Nevill Tyson as she left the room.

She soon reappeared, enchantingly pretty again in her laces and furs.

It was a glorious morning, the first thin white frost after a long thaw. The meet was in front of the Cross-Roads Inn, about a mile out of Drayton Parva. It was neutral ground, where Farmer Ashby could hold his own with Sir Peter any day, and speech was unfettered. Somebody remarked that Mrs. Nevill Tyson looked uncommonly happy in the dog-cart; while Tyson spoke to nobody and nobody spoke to him. Poor devil! he hadn't at all a pretty look on that queer bleached face of his. And all the time he kept twisting his horse's head round in a melancholy sort of way, and backing into things and out of them, fit to make you swear.

She must have noticed something. They were trotting along, Stanistreet driving, by a road that ran side by side with the fields scoured by the hunt, and Tyson could always be seen going recklessly and alone. He could

ride, he could ride! His worst enemy never doubted that.

"It's very odd," said she, "but the people here don't seem to like Nevill one bit. I suppose they've never seen anything quite like him before."

"I very much doubt if they have."

"*I* think they're afraid of him. Mother is, I know; she blinks when she talks to him."

"Does she blink when she talks to me?"

"Of course not—you're different."

"I am not her son-in-law, certainly."

"Do you know, though he's so much older than me—I simply shudder when I think he's thirty-seven—and so awfully clever, and *so* bad-tempered, I'm not in the least afraid of him. And he really has a shocking bad temper."

"I know it of old."

"So many nice people have bad tempers. I think it's the least horrid fault you can have; because it comes on you when you're not thinking, and it isn't your fault at all."

"No; it is generally some one else's."

"I don't think much of people's passions myself. He might have something far worse than that."

"Most undoubtedly. He might have atrocious taste in dress, or a tendency to drink."

"Don't be silly. Did you know him when he was young? I don't mean to say he isn't young—thirty-seven's young enough for anybody—I mean when he was young like me?"

"I can't say. I doubt if he was ever young—like you. But I knew him when he was a boy."

"So you understand him?"

"Oh, pretty well. Not always, perhaps. He's a difficult subject."

"Anyhow, you like him? Don't you?"

Stanistreet gave a curious hard laugh.

"Oh yes—I like him."

"That's all right. And really, I don't wonder that people can't make him out. He's the strangest animal *I* ever met in my life. I haven't made him out yet. I think I shall give him up."

"Give him up, by all means. Isn't that

what people generally do when they can't understand each other?"

Mrs. Nevill Tyson made no answer. She was trying to think, and thinking came hard to Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

"I suppose he's had a past. But of course it doesn't do to go poking and probing into a man's past——"

Stanistreet lifted his eyebrows and looked at the little woman. She was sitting bolt upright, staring out over the vague fields; she seemed to have uttered the words unconsciously, as if at the dictation of some familiar spirit. "And yet I wish—no, I don't wish I knew. I know he must have had an awful time of it." She turned her face suddenly on Stanistreet. "What do you think he told me the other day? He said he had never known anybody who wasn't either a fool or a sinner. What do you think of that? Must you be one or the other?"

Stanistreet shrugged his shoulders. "You may be both. We are all of us sinners, and certainly a great many of us are fools."

"I wonder. He isn't a fool."

Stanistreet wondered too. He wondered at the things she allowed herself to say; he wondered whether she was drawing any inference; and above all, he wondered at the shrinking introspective look on her careless face.

In another minute Mrs. Nevill Tyson had started from her seat and was waving her muff wildly in the air. "Look—there he goes! Oh, *did* you see him take that fence? What an insane thing to do with the ground like that."

He looked in the direction indicated by the muff, and saw Tyson riding far ahead of the hunt, a small scarlet blot on the gray-white landscape.

"By Jove! he rides as if he were charging the enemy's guns at the head of a line of cavalry."

"Yes." She leaned back; the excitement faded from her face, and she sighed. The sigh was so light that it scarcely troubled the frosty air, but it made Stanistreet look

at her again. How adorably pretty she was in all her moods!

Perhaps she was conscious of the look, for she rattled on again more incoherently than before. "I'm talking a great deal of nonsense; I always do when I get the chance. You can't talk nonsense to mother; she wouldn't understand it. She'd think it was sense. And, you see, I'm interested in my husband. I suppose it's the proper thing to take an interest in your husband. If you won't take an interest in your husband, what will you take an interest in? It's natural—not to say primitive. Do you know, he says I'm the most primitive person he ever came across. Should *you* say I was primitive? Don't answer that. I don't think he'd like me to talk about him quite so much. He thinks I never know where to draw the line. But I never see any lines to draw, and if I did, I wouldn't know how to draw them."

Stanistreet smiled grimly. He was wondering whether she *was* "primitive."

"Just look at Scarum's ears! Don't tease her. She doesn't like it. Dear thing! She's delicious to kiss—she's got such a soft nose. But she'll bolt as soon as look at you, and she's awfully hard to hold." Her fingers were twitching with the desire to hold Scarum.

"I think I can manage her."

"You see, somehow or the other I like talking to you. You may be a sinner, but I don't think you are a fool; and I've a sort of a notion that you understand."

He was silent. So many women had thought he understood.

"I wonder—*do* you understand?"

The eyes that Mrs. Nevill Tyson turned on Stanistreet were not search-lights; they were wells of darkness, unsearchable, unfathomable.

Something in Stanistreet, equally inscrutable, something that was himself and not himself, answered very low to that vague appeal.

"Yes, I understand."

He had turned towards her, smiling darkly, and all her face flashed back a happy smile.

Surely, oh surely, Mrs. Nevill Tyson was the soul of indiscretion; for at that moment Miss Batchelor, trotting past with Lady Morley, looked from them to her companion and smiled too.

That smile was the first stone.

Miss Batchelor acknowledged them with a curt little nod, and Mrs. Nevill Tyson's face became instantly overclouded. Louis leaned a little nearer and said in a husky, uneven voice, "Surely you don't mind that impertinent woman?"

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Nevill Tyson. "She's got a villainous seat."

"Then what are you thinking about?"

"I'm thinking what horrid hard lines it is that they won't let me hunt. All the time I might have been flying across country with Nevill, instead of——"

"Instead of crawling in a dog-cart with me. Thank you, Mrs. Nevill."

"You needn't thank me. I haven't given you anything."

Again Stanistreet wondered whether Mrs. Nevill was very simple or very profound. And wondering, he gave the mare a cut across the flanks that made her leap in the shafts.

"That was silly of you. She'll have her heels through before you know where you are. She's a demon to kick, is Scarum."

Scarum had spared the splash-board this time, but she was going furiously, and the little dog-cart rocked from side to side. Mrs. Nevill Tyson rose to her feet.

"Strikes me you can't drive a little bit," said she.

"Please sit down, Mrs. Tyson." But Mrs. Tyson remained imperiously standing, trying to keep her balance like a small sailor in a rollicking sea.

"Get up."

Stanistreet muttered wrathfully under his mustache, and she caught the words "damned foolery."

"Bundle out this minute." She made a grab at the rail in an undignified manner.

He doubled the reins firmly over his right hand, and with his left arm he forced her back into her seat. He was holding her there when Farmer Ashby turned out of a by-lane and followed close behind them. And Farmer Ashby had a nice tale to tell at "The Cross-Roads" of how he had seen the Captain driving with his arm round Mrs. Tyson's waist.

That was another stone.

Stanistreet tugged at the reins with both hands and pulled the mare almost on to her haunches; her hoofs shrieked on the iron road; she stood still and snorted, her forelegs well out, her hide smoking.

When he had made quite sure that the animal's attitude was that of temporary exhaustion rather than of passion, Stanistreet changed seats, and gave the reins to Mrs. Nevill Tyson; and Scarum burst into her second heat.

"I suppose you have a right to drive your own animal into the ditch," said he.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson set her teeth with a determined air, planted her feet firmly on the floor of the trap to give herself a good purchase; she gave the reins a little twist as she had seen Stanistreet do, she balanced the whip like a fishing-rod, with the line dangling over Scarum's ears, and then she rattled away over the wrinkling roads at a glorious pace; she reeled over cart-ruts, she went thump over sods and bump over mud-heaps, she grazed walls and hedges, skimmed over the brink of ditches, careened round corners, and tore past most things on the wrong side; and Stanistreet's sense of deadly peril was lost in the pleasure of seeing her do it. When she was not chattering to him she was encouraging Scarum with all sorts of endearments, small chirping sounds and delicate chuckles, smiling that indefinably malicious, lop-sided smile which Stanistreet had been taught all his life to interpret as a challenge. Now they were going down a lane of beeches, they bent their heads under the branches, and a shower of rime fell about her shoulders,

powdering her black hair; he watched it thawing in the warmth there till it sparkled like a fine dew; and now they were running between low hedges, and the keen air from the frosted fields smote the blood into her cheeks and the liquid light into her eyes; it lifted the fringe from her forehead and crisped it over the fur border of her hat; flying ends of lace and sable were flung behind her like streamers; she seemed to be winged with the wind of speed; she was the embodiment of vivid, reckless, beautiful life.

It came over him with a sort of shock that this woman was Tyson's wife, irrevocably, until one or other of them died. And Tyson was not the sort of man to die for anybody's convenience but his own.

At last they swayed into the courtyard at Thorneytoft. "Thank heaven we're alive!" he said, as he followed her into the house.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson turned on the threshold. "Do you mean to say you didn't enjoy it?"

"Oh, of course it was delightful; but I don't know that it was exactly—safe."

"I see—you were afraid. We were safe enough so long as *I* was driving."

He smiled drearily. He felt that he had been whirled along in a delirious dream—a madman driven by a fool. As if in answer to his thoughts, she called back over the banisters—

"I'm not such a fool as I look, you know."

No, for the life of him Stanistreet did not know. His doubt was absurd, for it implied that Mrs. Nevill Tyson practiced the art of symbolism, and he could hardly suppose her to be so well acquainted with the resources of language. On the other hand, he could not conceive how, after living more than half a year with Tyson, she had preserved her formidable *naïveté.*

At dinner that evening she still further obscured the question by boasting that she had saved Captain Stanistreet's life. Stanistreet protested.

"Nonsense," said she; "you know per-

fectly well that you'd have upset the whole show if you'd been left to yourself."

Tyson stared at his wife. "Do you mean to say that he let you drive?"

"Let me? Not he! He couldn't help it." Her white throat shook with derisive laughter. "I took the reins; or, if you like, I kicked over the traces. I always told you I'd do it some day."

Tyson pushed his chair back from the table and scowled meditatively. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was smiling softly to herself as she played with the water in her finger-glass. Presently she rose and shook the drops from her finger-tips, like one washing her hands of a light matter. Stanistreet got up and opened the door for her, standing very straight and militant and grim; and as she passed through she looked back at him and laughed again.

"I can see," said Tyson, as Stanistreet took his seat again, "you've been letting that wife of mine make more or less of a fool of herself. If you had no consideration for her

neck or your own, you might have thought of my son and heir."

"Oh," said Stanistreet, a little vaguely, for he was startled, "I kept a good lookout."

"Not much use in that," said Tyson.

Stanistreet battled with his doubt. Tyson had furnished him with a key to his wife's moods. Moreover, a simpler explanation had occurred to him. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was fond of driving; she had been forbidden to drive, therefore she drove; she had never driven any animal in her life before, and, notwithstanding her inexperience, she had accomplished the dangerous feat without injury to anybody. Hence no doubt her laughter and her triumph.

But this again was symbolism. He determined to sleep on it.

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT WATCH

LIKE all delightful things, Mrs. Nevill Tyson's laughter was short-lived. When Tyson went up to bed that night between twelve and one, he found his wife sitting by her bedroom fire in the half-darkness. Evidently contemplation had overtaken her in the act of undressing, for her hair was still untouched, her silk bodice lay beside her on the floor where she had let it fall, and she sat robed in her long dressing-gown. He came up to her, holding his candle so that the light fell full on her face; it looked strange and pale against the vivid scarlet of her gown. Her eyes, too, were dim, her mouth had lost its delicate outline, her cheeks seemed to have grown slightly, ever so slightly, fuller, and the skin looked glazed as if by the courses of many tears. He had noticed these changes

before; of late they had come many times in the twelve hours; but to-night it seemed not so much a momentary disfigurement as a sudden precocious maturity, as if nature had stamped her face with the image of what it would be ten, fifteen years hence. And as he looked at her a cold and subtle pang went through him, a curious abominable sensation, mingled with a sort of spiritual pain. He dared not give a name to the one feeling, but the other he easily recognized as self-reproach. He had known it once or twice before.

He stooped over her and kissed her. "Why are you sitting up here and crying, all by your little self?"

She shook her head.

"What are you crying about? You didn't suppose I was angry with you?"

"No. I wouldn't have cried if you had been angry. I'm not crying now. I don't know why I cried at all. I'm tired, or cold, or something."

"Why don't you go to bed, then?"

"I'm going." She rose wearily and went

to the dressing-table. He watched her reflection in the looking-glass. As she raised her arms to take the pins from her hair, her white face grew whiter, it was deadly white. He went to her help, unpinning the black coils, smoothing them and plaiting them in a loose braid. He did it in a business-like way, as if he had been a hairdresser, he whose pulse used to beat faster if he so much as touched her gown. Then he gave her a cold business-like kiss that left her sadder than before. The fact was, he had thought she was going to faint. But Mrs. Nevill Tyson was not of the fainting kind; she was only tired, tired and sick.

It was arranged that Tyson was to leave by the two o'clock train the next day. He was packing up his things about noon, when Molly staggered into his dressing-room with her teeth chattering. Clinging to the rail of the bedstead for support, she gazed at the preparations for his departure.

"I wish you wouldn't go away, Nevill," she said.

"It's all right, I'll be back in a day or two." He blushed at his own lie.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson sat down on the bed and began to cry.

"What's the matter, Moll, eh?"

"I don't know, I don't know," she sobbed. "I'm afraid, Nevill—I'm so terribly afraid."

"Why, what are you afraid of?" He looked up and was touched by the terror in her face.

"I don't know. But I can bear it—I won't be silly and frightened—I can bear it if you'll only stay."

She slid on to her knees beside him; and while she implored him to stay, her hands worked unconsciously, helping him to go—smoothing and folding his clothes, and laying them in little heaps about the floor, her figure swaying unsteadily as she knelt.

He put his arm round her; he drew her head against his shoulder; and she looked up into his face, trying to smile.

"You won't leave me?" she whispered hoarsely.

He laid his hand upon her forehead. It was damp with the first sweat of her agony.

He carried her to her room and sent for Mrs. Wilcox and the doctor and the nurse. Then he went back and began turning the things in and out of his portmanteau in a melancholy, undecided manner. Mrs. Wilcox came and found him doing it.

"I'm not going," he said in answer to her indignant stare.

"I'm glad to hear it. Because if you *do* go——"

"I am not going."

But Mrs. Wilcox's maternal instinct had subdued her fear of Nevill Tyson, and he respected her defiance even more than he had respected her fear. "If you go you'll put her in a fever, and *I* won't answer for the consequences."

He said nothing, for he had a sense of justice, and it was her hour. Besides, he was no little conscience-stricken.

He went out to look for Stanistreet, and found him in the courtyard, piling his own

luggage on the dog-cart. He put his hand on his shoulder. "Look here," said he, "I can't go. It's a damned nuisance, but it's out of the question. Leave those things till to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" Stanistreet stared vaguely at his host.

"Yes; you must see me through this, Stanny. I can't trust myself by myself. For God's sake let's go and do something, or I'll go off my head."

They spent the afternoon in the low coverts about the Toft, and the evening in the billiard-room, sitting forlornly over whiskey-and-soda. A peculiar throbbing silence and mystery seemed to hang about the house. Stanistreet was depressed and hardly spoke, while Tyson vainly tried to hide his nervousness under a fictitious jocularity. He looked eagerly for the night, by which time he had concluded that all anxiety would be ended. But when ten o'clock came and he found that nothing more nor less than a long night-watch was required of him, his nerves revolted.

"I wonder how long this business is going to last? I wish to God I'd never stayed." He leaned back against the chimney-piece, grinding his heels on the fender in his irritation. "I was a fool not to get away in the morning when I had the chance."

He looked up and saw Stanistreet regarding him with a curiously critical expression. Louis did not look very like sitting up all night; his lean face was haggard already.

"I say, Stanistreet, it's awfully good of you to stop like this. I'm confoundedly sorry I asked you to. I don't know how we're going to get through the night." He cast a glance at the billiard-table. "Pity we can't knock the balls about a bit—but you see they'd hear us, and she might think it a little cold-blooded."

"My dear fellow, I'm ready to sit up with you till any time in the morning, and I never felt less like billiards in my life."

"Then there's nothing for it that I can see but a mighty smoke—it'll soothe our nerves

any way. And a mighty drink—we shall need it, you bet."

He rang the bell, lit his first cigar, and settled himself for his watch. His irritation was still sullenly fermenting; for not only was he going to spend a disagreeable night, but he had been most inconsiderately balked of a pleasant one.

"It's inconceivable," said he, "the things women expect you to do. If I could do her the smallest good by stopping I wouldn't complain. But I can't see her, can't go near her, can't do her the least bit of good in the world —I would be better out of the way, in fact—and yet I have to stick here, fretting myself into a fever. If I didn't do it I should be an unfeeling, heartless, disgusting brute. See? That's the way they reason."

Presently, under the soothing influence of the cigar, he settled down into some semblance of his former self. He talked almost as well as usual, touching on such light local topics as Miss Batchelor and the new Parish Council; he told Mrs. Nevill's barrister story

with variations, and that landed him in a discussion of his plans. "I very much doubt whether I shall die a country gentleman after all. It isn't the life for me. That old man's respectability was ideal — transcendental — it's too much for me. I don't know why he left it to me. Sheer cussedness, I suppose. It would have been just like him if he had left me his immortality, on the condition that I should spend it at Drayton Parva. I couldn't stand that. I don't even know if I can stand another year of it. I shall be dragged to the center again some of these days. It must come. As it is, I'm a rag of a human moth fluttering round the lamps of town."

"Fate," said Stanistreet.

"Not at all. If I go, it'll be chance that takes me—pure chance."

"Don't see much difference myself."

"There's all the difference. Ask any man who's been chivied about to all the ends of the earth and back again. He can tell you something about chance, but I doubt if he swears much by fate. Chance—oh Lord,

don't I know it!—chance takes you up and plays with you, pleases you or teases you, and drops you when she's tired of you. Like—some ladies of our acquaintance, and you're none the worse for it, not you! Fate looks devilish well after you, loves you or hates you, and in either case sticks to you and ruins you. Like your wife. To complete the little allegory, you can have as many chances as you like, but only one fate. Needless to say, though my chances have been many and charming, I naturally prefer my—fate."

Tyson was a master of the graceful art of symbolism, and Stanistreet had caught the trick from him. At the present moment he would have given a great deal to know how much of all this was a mere playing with words.

There was a sound of hurrying feet in the room upstairs, and the two men held their breath. Tyson was the first to recover.

"Good God, Stanistreet, how white you are! I wish I hadn't let you in for this. I'm not in the least nervous myself, you know.

She's all right. Thompson says so. I'm awfully sorry for the poor little soul, but if you come to think of it, it's the most natural and ordinary thing in the world."

But Stanistreet's thoughts were back in yesterday. He could see nothing, think of nothing but the little figure going through the doorway, and laughing as it went.

"Do you mind not talking about it?" said he.

Tyson sat quiet for a while, except when some obscure movement overhead roused him from his philosophic calm. Towards midnight Mrs. Wilcox came to the door and spoke to him for a minute. After that he became thoughtful. "I don't quite like the look of it," said he; "he's sent for Baker of Drayton—I suppose it means that the idiot has just sense enough not to trust his own judgment. But I don't like it."

By the time he had struck another attitude, lit another cigar, and gulped down another tumbler of whiskey-and-soda, philosophic calm gave way to philosophic doubt. "I don't

know who has the management of these things, but what I want to know is—why do they make women like that? Is it justice? Is it even common decency? What do you think?"

Stanistreet moved impatiently. "I don't think. I've no opinion on the subject. And I never interfere between a man and his Maker—it's bad form. They must settle it between them."

"It's all very well to be so infernally polite. But this sort of thing wakes you up impolitely, and makes you ask impolite questions. I suppose I've seen men die by dozens —so have you—seen them die as if they enjoyed it, and seen them foaming at the mouth, kicking against death—and I can't say it particularly staggered my belief in my Maker. But when it comes to the women, somehow it seems more polite not to believe in him than to believe that he does these damnable things on purpose."

Stanistreet closed his eyes to shut out the sight of Tyson and his eternal cigar, and the

slow monotonous movement of his lips. His friend's theological views were not exactly the supreme interest of the moment.

"Down there in the desert" (Tyson seemed to dream as he raised his eyes to the great map of the Soudan that hung above the chimney-piece), "where there's no end to the sand and the sky, and man's nothing and woman less than nothing, this curious belief in the infinite seems the natural thing; it simply possesses you. You know the feeling? But here it gets crowded out somehow; it's too big for these little houses we've got to live in, and work in, and die in. It's beastly business thinking, though. I fancy old Tennyson got very near the mark—

> 'Perplexed in faith, but *pure in deeds*,
> At last he beat his music out;
> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half——'"

There was a sharp bitter cry, stifled in the instant of its utterance, and Tyson started to his feet. His mouth worked convulsively. "My God! I don't care who's responsible

for this filthy world. Nobody but a fiend could take that little thing and torture her so. Think of it, Louis!"

"I'm trying not to think of it. It's damnable as you say, but—other women have to stand it."

"Other women!" Tyson flung the words out like an execration that throbbed with his scorn and loathing of the sex. Other women! By an act of his will he had put his wife on a high pedestal for the moment—made her shine, for the moment, white and fair above the contemptible herd, her obscure multitudinous sisterhood. Other women! The phrase had an undertone of dull passionate self-reproach that was distinctly audible to Stanistreet's finer ear. Stanistreet knew many things about Tyson—knew, for instance, the cause that but for this would have taken him up to town; and Tyson knew that he knew.

If it came to that, Stanistreet too had some grounds for self-reproach. He took up a book and tried to read; but the words reeled and

staggered and grew dim before him; he found himself listening to the ticking of the clock, and the pulse of time became a woman's heart beating violently with pain, a heart indistinguishable from his own. Other women (it was he who had used the words)—was it simply by her share in their grim lot that Mrs. Nevill Tyson had contrived to invest herself with this somber significance? Perhaps. It was the same woman that he had driven with, laughed with, flirted with a hundred times—the woman that in the natural course of things (Tyson apart) he would infallibly have made love to; and yet in one day and one night her prettinesses, her impertinences had fallen from her like a frivolous garment, leaving only the simple eternal lines of her womanhood. Henceforth, whatever he might think, he would not think of her to-morrow as he had thought yesterday; whatever he felt to-morrow, his feeling would never lose that purifying touch of tragic pity. Mrs. Nevill Tyson would never be the same woman that he had known before. And yet—

she was a fool, a fool; and he doubted if her sufferings would make her any wiser.

Tyson looked at his watch. "Look there, Stanistreet, it's two o'clock—there *must* be some blundering. I'll speak to Baker. What are those damned doctors thinking of? Why can't they have done with it? Why can't they put her under chloroform?"

One by one the lamps over the billiard-table died down and went out; the firelight leapt and started on the wall, making the gloom of the great room visible; in the half-darkness Tyson became clairvoyant, and his self-reproach grew dominant and clamorous. "It's all my fault—if she dies it'll be my fault! But how was I to know? How could I tell that anything like this would happen? I swear I'd die rather than let her go through this villainy a second time. It's infamous—I'll kill myself before it happens again!" He flung himself on the sofa and turned his face to the wall, muttering invectives, blasphemies —a confused furious arraignment of the finite and the Infinite.

At three o'clock the doctors sent for him. When he came back he was very silent. He lay down again quietly, and from time to time his lips moved, whether in imprecation or prayer it was hard to say; but it struck Stanistreet that Tyson's mind had veered again to the orthodoxy of terror.

There was silence overhead too. They were putting her under chloroform.

Another hour and the window-panes glimmered as if a tissue of liquid air were spread between them and the darkness. There was a break in the night outside, a livid streak of dawn; the objects in the room took curious unintelligible shapes, the billiard-table in its white cloth became a monstrous bed, a bier, a gleaming mausoleum. And with the dawn Tyson on his sofa had dropped into a doze, and thence into a sleep. The night's orgy of emotion had left his features in a curious moral disarray; once or twice a sort of bubbling murmur rose to his lips. "Poor devil!" thought Stanistreet, "I'd give anything to know how much he really cared."

Stanistreet still watched. Mrs. Wilcox found him sitting bent forward, with his elbows on his knees and his face hidden in his hands. He was roused by her touch on his shoulder. He started when he saw her standing over him, a strange figure in the dull light. She was clad in a long gray dressing-gown, her hair uncurled, red rims round her eyes and dark streaks under them, her mouth swollen and trembling. That night had been a rude shock to her optimism.

Stanistreet never knew how he became possessed of her plump hand, nor what he did with it. His eyes looked the question he was afraid to speak.

"It's all right—all per—perfectly right," stammered the optimist. "Wake him up, please, and tell him he has got a son."

CHAPTER VI

A SON AND HEIR

It seems a simple thing to believe in the divinity of motherhood, when you have only seen it in the paintings of one or two old masters, or once in a while perhaps in flesh and blood, transfiguring the face of some commonplace vulgar woman whom, but for that, nobody would have called beautiful. But sometimes the divine thing chooses some morsel of humanity like Mrs. Nevill Tyson, struggles with and overpowers it, rending the small body, spoiling the delicate beauty; and where you looked for the illuminating triumphant glory of motherhood, you find, as Tyson found, a woman with a pitiful plain face and apathetic eyes—apathetic but for the dull horror of life that wakes in them every morning.

That Tyson had the sentiment of the thing

is pretty certain. When he went up to town (for he went, after all, when the baby was a week old), he brought back with him a picture (a Madonna of Botticelli's, I think) in a beauful frame, as a present for his wife. Poor little soul! I believe she thought he had gone up on purpose to get it (it was so lovely that he might well have taken a fortnight to find it); and she had it hung up over the chimney-piece in her bedroom, so that she could see it whether she were sitting up or lying down.

Now, whether it was the soothing influence of that belief, or whether Mrs. Nevill Tyson, the mystic of a moment, found help in the gray eyes of the mother of God when Nevill had pointed out their beauty, pointed out, too, the paradox of the divine hands pressing the human breasts for the milk of life, she revived so far as to take, or seem to take, an interest in her son. She indulged in no ecstasies of maternal passion; but as she nursed the little creature, her face began to show a serene half-ruminant, half-spiritual content.

He was very tiny, tinier than any baby she

had ever seen, as well he might be considering that he had come into the world full seven weeks before his time; his skin was very red; his eyes were very small, but even they looked too large for his ridiculous face; his fingers were fine, like little claws; and his hands—she could hardly feel their feeble kneading of her breast. He was not at all a pretty baby, but he was very light to hold.

Tyson had not the least objection to Stanistreet or Sir Peter and the rest of them, they were welcome to stare at his wife as much as they pleased; but he was insanely jealous of this minute masculine thing that claimed so much of her attention. He began to have a positive dislike to seeing her with the child. There was a strain of morbid sensibility in his nature, and what was beautiful to him in a Botticelli Madonna, properly painted and framed, was not beautiful—to him—in Mrs. Nevill Tyson. He had the sentiment of the thing, as I said, but the thing itself, the flesh and blood of it, was altogether too much for his fastidious nerves. And yet once or twice

he had seen her turn away from him, clutching hastily at the open bodice of her gown; once she had started up and left the room when he came into it; and, curious contradiction that he was, it had hurt him indescribably. He thought he recognized in these demonstrations a prouder instinct than feminine false shame. It was as if she had tried to hide from him some sacred thing—as if she had risen up in her indignation to guard the portals of her soul. To be sure he was in no mood just then for entering sanctuaries; but for all that he did not like to have the door slammed in his face.

Thank heaven, the worst had not happened. The little creature's volatile beauty fluttered back to her from time to time; there was a purified transparent quality in it that had been wanting before. It had still the trick of fluctuating, vanishing, as if it had caught something of her soul's caprice; but while it was there Mrs. Nevill Tyson was a more beautiful woman than she had been before. Some men might have preferred this divine

uncertainty to a more monotonous prettiness. Tyson was not one of these.

One afternoon, about a fortnight after his return from town, he found her sitting in the library with "the animal," as he called his son. There had been a sound of singing, but it ceased as he came in. The child's shawl was lying on the floor; he picked it up and pitched it to the other end of the room. Then he came up to her and scanned her face closely.

"What's the matter with you?" he said.

"Nothing. Do I—do I look funny?" She put her hand to her hair, a trick of Mrs. Nevill Tyson's when she was under criticism. She had been such an untidy little girl.

"Oh, damned funny. Look here. You've had about enough of that. You must stop it."

"What? Why?"

"Because it takes up your time, wastes your strength, ruins your figure—it *has* ruined your complexion—and it—it makes you a public nuisance."

"I can't help it."

She got up and stood by the window with her back to Tyson. She still held the child to her breast, but she was not looking at him; she was looking away through the window, rocking her body slightly backwards and forwards, either to soothe the child or to vent her own impatience.

Tyson's angry voice followed her. "Of course you can help it. Other women can. You must wean the animal."

She turned. "Oh, Nevill, look at him——"

"I don't want to look at him."

"But—he's so ti-i-ny. Whatever *will* he do?"

"Do? He'll do as other women's children do."

"He won't. He'll die."

"Not he. Catch him dying. He'll only howl more infernally than he's howled before. That's all he'll do. Do him good too—teach him that he can't get everything he wants in this vile world. But whatever he does I'm not going to have you sacrificed to him."

"I'm not sacrificed. I don't mind it."

"Well, then, *I* mind it. That's enough. I hate the little beast coming into my room at night."

"He needn't come. I can go to him."

"All right. If you want to make an invalid scarecrow of yourself before your time, it's not my business. Only don't come to me for sympathy, that's all."

With one of her passionate movements, she snatched the child from her breast, carried him upstairs screaming and laid him on her bed. When the nurse came she found him writhing and wailing, and his mother on her knees beside the bed, her face hidden in the counterpane.

"Take him away," sobbed Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

"Ma'am?" said the nurse.

"Take him away, I tell you. I won't—I can't nurse him. It—it makes me ill."

And forthwith she went off into a fit of hysterics.

It was at this crisis of the baby's fate that Miss Batchelor, of all people, took it into her

head to call. After all, Tyson was Nevill Tyson, Esquire, of Thorneytoft, and his wife had been somewhere very near death's door. People who would have died rather than call for any other reason, called "to inquire." As did Miss Batchelor, saying to herself that nothing should induce her to go in.

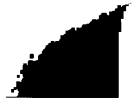
Now as she was inquiring in her very softest voice, who should come up to the doorstep but Tyson. He smiled as he greeted her. He was polite; he was charming; for as a matter of fact he had been rather hard-driven of late, and a little kindness touched him, especially when it came from an unexpected quarter.

"This is very good of you, Miss Batchelor," said he. "I hope you'll come in and see my wife."

Miss Batchelor played nervously with her card-case.

"I—I—— Would your wi—would Mrs. Tyson care to see me?"

He smiled again. "I think I can answer for that."



And to her own intense surprise, for the first and last time Miss Batchelor crossed the threshold of Thorneytoft.

They found the little woman sitting in her drawing-room with her hands before her, and Mrs. Nevill Tyson did not smile at Miss Batchelor as she greeted her. Perhaps with her feminine instinct and antipathy, she felt that Miss Batchelor had not come to see *her*. So she smiled at her husband, and the smile was gall and wormwood to the clever woman; it had the effect, too, of bringing back to her recollection the occasion on which she had last seen Mrs. Nevill Tyson smiling. She wondered whether Mrs. Nevill Tyson also recalled the incident. If she did she must find the situation rather trying.

Apparently Mrs. Nevill Tyson was so happily constituted that to her trying situations were a stimulant and a resource. She prattled to Miss Batchelor about her new side-saddle, and her "friend, Captain Stanistreet"—any subject that came uppermost and dragged another with it to the surface.

Miss Batchelor was very kind and sympathetic; she took an interest in the saddle; she assured Mrs. Nevill Tyson that Drayton Parva had been much concerned on her account; and she asked to see the baby.

The next instant she was sorry she had done so, for Tyson, who had continued to be charming, went out of the room when the baby came in.

The child was laid in Mrs. Nevill Tyson's lap, and she looked at it with a gay indifference. "Isn't he a queer thing?" said she. "He isn't pretty a bit, so you needn't say so. Nevill calls him a boiled shrimp, and a little rat. He *is* rather like a little rat—a baby rat, when it's all pink and squirmy, you know, and its eyes just opened—they've got such pretty bright eyes. But I'm afraid baby's eyes are more like pig's eyes. Well, *they're* pretty too. As he's so ugly I expect he's going to be clever, like Nevill. They say he's like me. What do you think? Look at his forehead. Do you think he's going to be clever?"

"It depends," said Miss Batchelor, a little maliciously. (Really, the woman was impossible, and such a hopeless fool!) Miss Batchelor's habitually nervous manner made her innuendoes doubly telling when they came.

"Well—he's very small. Just feel how small he is."

Instinctively Miss Batchelor held out her hands for the child, and in another moment he was lying across her arms, slobbering dreamily.

He was not quiet long. He stretched himself, he writhed, he made himself limp, he made himself stiff, he threw himself backwards recklessly; and still Miss Batchelor held him. And when he cried she held him all the closer. She let him explore the front of her dress with his little wet mouth and fingers. He had made a great many futile experiments of the kind in the last two days. Of those three worlds that were his, the world of light, the world of sleep, and the world of his mother's breast, they had taken away the

one that he liked best—the warm living world of which he had been lord and master, that was flesh of his flesh, given to his hands to hold, and obedient to the pressure of his lips. Since then he had lived from feeble hope to hope; and now, when he struck upon that hard and narrow tract of corduroy studded with comfortless buttons, he began again his melancholy wail.

"Poor little beggar," said Mrs. Nevill Tyson, "he can't help it. He's being weaned. Don't let him slobber over your nice dress."

Certainly he had not improved the corduroy, but Miss Batchelor did not seem to resent it.

"Can't you nurse him?" she asked.

"No," said Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

"I don't believe it," said Miss Batchelor to herself. "She isn't that sort. It's the clever, nervous, modern women who can't nurse their children—it all runs to brains. But these little animals! If ever there was a woman born to suckle fools, it's Mrs. Nevill Tyson. She's got the physique, the tempera-

ment, everything. And she can give her whole mind to it."

"What a pity," she said aloud, and Mrs. Nevill Tyson laughed.

"I don't want to nurse him; why should I?" said she. She lay back in her attitude of indifference, watching her son, and watched by Miss Batchelor's sharp eyes and heartless brain.

Heartless? Well, I can't say. Not altogether, perhaps. Goodness knows what went on in the heart of that extraordinary woman, condemned by her own cleverness to perpetual maidenhood.

"How very odd," said she to Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

To herself she said, "I thought so. It's not that she can't. She *won't*—selfish little thing. And yet—she isn't the kind that abominates babies, as such. Therefore if she doesn't care for this small thing, *that* is because it's her husband's child."

To do Miss Batchelor justice, she was appalled by her own logic. Was it the logic of

the heart or of the brain? She did not stop to think. Having convinced herself that her argument was a chain of adamant, she caught herself leaning on it for support, with the surprising result that she found it easier to be kind to Mrs. Nevill Tyson (a woman who presumably did not love her husband) when she took her leave.

I am not going to be hard on her. To some women a bitterer thing than not to be loved is not to be allowed to love. And when two women insist on loving the same man, the despised one is naturally skeptical as to the strength and purity and eternity of the other's feelings. "She never loved him!" is the heart's consolation to the lucid brain reiterating "He never loved me!" I did not say that Miss Batchelor loved Tyson.

So the baby was weaned. He did not howl under the process so much as his father expected. He lost his cheerful red hue and grew thin; he was indifferent to things around him, so that people thought poorly of his intelligence, and the nurse shook her head

and said it was a "bad sign when they took no notice." Gradually, very gradually, his features settled into an expression of disillusionment, curious in one so young. Perhaps he bore in his blood reminiscences, forebodings of that wonderful and terrible world he had been in such a hurry to enter. He was Tyson's son and heir.

And that other baby, Mrs. Nevill Tyson, so violently weaned from the joy of motherhood, she too grew pale and thin; she too was indifferent to things around her, and she took very little notice of her son.

By a strange and unfortunate coincidence Captain Stanistreet had not been seen in Drayton for the space of five months; and coupling this fact with Mrs. Nevill Tyson's altered looks, the logical mind of Drayton Parva drew its own conclusions.

CHAPTER VII

SIR PETER'S NEW CLOTHES

TYSON had not married in order to improve his social position; he had married because he was in love as he had never been in love before. He would have married a barmaid, if necessary, for the same reason. He was not long in finding out that he owed his unpopularity in a great measure to his marriage. To the curious observer this consciousness of his mistake was conspicuous in his manner. (It was to be hoped that his wife was not a curious observer.) And Sir Peter made matters no better by going about declaring that Mrs. Nevill Tyson was the loveliest woman in Leicestershire, when everybody knew that his wife had flatly refused to call on her. By this time Tyson was quite aware that his standing in the county had depended

all along on the support which the Morleys were pleased to give him. They had taken him up in the beginning, and his position had seemed secure. If at that ripe moment he had chosen to strengthen it by a marriage with Lady Morley's dearest friend, he might have been anything he pleased. Miss Batchelor of Meriden would have proved a still more powerful ally than Sir Peter. She would have been as ambitious for him as he could have been for himself. By joining the estates of Thorneytoft and Meriden, Nevill Tyson, Esquire, would have become one of the largest landowners in Leicestershire, when in all probability he would have known the joy of representing his county in Parliament. He was born for life on a large scale, a life of excitement and action; and there were times when a political career presented itself to his maturer fancy as the end and crown of existence. All this might have been open to him if he had chosen; if, for instance, this clever man had not cherished a rooted objection to the society of clever women. As it was, his

marriage had made him the best-abused man in those parts.

Since Tyson was not to mold his country's destinies in Parliament, he turned his attention to local politics as the next best thing, thus satisfying his appetite for action. He did what he had told Miss Batchelor he should do; he dissipated himself in parochial patriotism. He went to and fro, he presided at meetings, sat on committees, made speeches on platforms. You would hardly have thought that one parish could have contained so much fiery energy. Moreover, he found a field for his journalistic talents in a passionate correspondence in the local papers. Tyson could speak, Tyson could write, where other men maunder and drivel. His tongue was tipped with fire and his pen with vitriol. Looking about him for a worthy antagonist, he singled out Smedley, M.D., a local practitioner given over to two ideals—sanitation and reform. Needless to say, for sanitation and reform Tyson cared not a hang. It was a stand-up fight between the man of

facts and the man of letters. Smedley was solid and imperturbable; he stood firm on his facts, and defended himself with figures. Tyson, a master of literary strategy, was alert and ubiquitous. Having driven Smedley into a tangled maze of controversy, Tyson pursued him with genial irony. When Smedley argued, Tyson riddled his arguments with the lightest of light banter; when Smedley hung back, Tyson lured him on with some artful feint; when Smedley thrust, Tyson dodged. Finally, when Smedley, so to speak, drew up all his facts and figures in the form of a hollow square, Tyson charged with magnificent contempt of danger. No doubt Tyson's method was extremely amusing and effective, and his sparkling periods proved the enemy's dullness up to the hilt; unfortunately, the prosy but responsible representations of Smedley had more weight with committees.

Only two people really appreciated that correspondence. They were Mrs. Nevill Tyson and Miss Batchelor. "At this rate," said

the lady of Meriden, smiling to herself, "my friend Samson will very soon bring down the house."

Tyson, contemptuous of the gallery, had been playing to Sir Peter and Sir Peter alone, and he flattered himself that this time he had caught the great man's eye. It was in the first excitement of the elections; Tyson had come in from Drayton, and was glancing as usual at the visiting cards on the hall table. On the top of the dusty pile that had accumulated in the days of his wife's illness there was actually a fresh card. Tyson's face lost something of its militant expression when he read the name "Sir Peter Morley," and he smiled up through the banisters at his wife as she came downstairs to greet him.

"Ha, Molly, I see Morley's looked us up again. He couldn't very well be off it much longer."

"He called about the elections."

"Oh—I thought you were out?"

"So I was. I met him in the drive and made him come in."

"H'm. Did he say anything about my letters in the *Herald*?"

Mrs. Nevill Tyson hesitated. "N-no. Not much."

"What did he say?"

"Oh—I think—he only said it was rather a pity you'd mixed yourself up with it."

"Damn his impertinence!"

He flicked the card with a disdainful finger-nail and followed his wife into the drawing-room. She gave him some tea to keep him quiet; he drank it in passionate gulps. Then he felt better, and lay back in his chair biting his mustache meditatively.

"By the way, did Morley say whether he'd support Ringwood? The fellow's a publican, likewise a sinner, but we must rush him in for the District Council."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Nevill Tyson, trying hard to be interested.

"Why? To keep that radical devil out, of course; a cad that spits on his Bible, and would do the same for his Queen's face any day—if he got the chance. I'd like to sound

Morley, though." A smile flickered on his lips, as he anticipated the important interview.

"Oh, he did say something about it. I remember now. I think he's going to vote for the Smedley man."

Tyson's smile went out suddenly. He was scowling now. Not that he cared a straw which way the elections went, but he liked to "mix himself up" in them to give himself local color; and now it seemed that he had taken the wrong shade. He had spent the better part of six weeks in badgering and bullying Sir Peter's pet candidate.

"Morley's a miserable time-server," said he savagely. "I suppose the usual excuses for his wife's not calling?"

"Neuralgia," said Mrs. Nevill Tyson, with a grin.

"Neur-*al*gia! Why couldn't he give her a stomach-ache for a change?"

Now, when Tyson expressed his opinion of Sir Peter with such delightful frankness, both he and Mrs. Nevill had overlooked the trifling

fact that Pinker, the footman, while to all outward appearance absorbed in emptying a coal-scuttle, was listening with all his ears. Pinker was an intelligent fellow, interested in local politics, still more interested in the affairs of his master and mistress. The dust upon those visiting-cards had provided Pinker with much matter for reflection. Now men will say anything in the passion of elections; but when it was reported that Mr. Nevill Tyson had in private pronounced Sir Peter to be a "miserable time-server," and in public (that is to say, in Drayton Town Hall) declared excitedly—"We will have no time-servers—men who will go through any gate you open for them—we Leicestershire people want a man who rides straight across country, and doesn't funk his fences!" And when Sir Peter remarked that "no doubt Mr. Tyson had taken some nasty ones in his time," everybody knew that there was something more behind all this than mere party feeling.

Sir Peter was right: that electioneering business was Tyson's third great mistake. It

proved, what nobody would have been very much aware of, that Nevill Tyson, Esquire, had next to no standing in the county. As a public man he was worse off than he would have been as a harmless private individual. He could never have been found out if he had only stayed quietly at home and devoted himself to the cultivation of orchids, in the manner of old Tyson, who had managed to hoodwink himself and his neighbors into the belief that he was a country gentleman. As it was, for such a clever fellow Tyson had displayed stupidity that was almost ridiculous. For nobody ever denied that he was a clever fellow, that he could have been anything that he liked; in fact, he had been most things already. Anything he liked—except a country gentleman. The country gentleman, like the poet, is born, not made; and it was a question if Tyson had ever been a gentleman at all. He had all the accidents of the thing, but not its substance, its British stability and reserve. Civilization was rubbing off him at the edges; he seemed to be struggling against some

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primeval tendency. You expected at any moment to see a reversion to some earlier and uglier type. Across the chastened accents of the journalist there sounded the wild intemperate tongue of the man of the people. Miss Batchelor used to declare that Tyson was a self-made man, because he was constructed on such eccentric principles. His slightest movements showed that he was uncertain of his ground, and ready to fight you for it, if it came to that. And now he still met you with the twinkle in his small blue eyes, but there was a calculating light behind it, as if he were measuring his forces against yours. And you were sorry for him in spite of yourself. With the spirit of the soldier of Fortune, Tyson had the nerves and temper of her spoilt child. He had made an open bid for popularity and failed, and it was positively painful to see him writhing under the consciousness of his failure.

And the cause of it all was Mrs. Nevill Tyson. Yet he was proud of her still; proud even of the notoriety which was a tribute to

her beauty. To tell the truth, her notoriety was his protection. Once the elections were over, gossip was too busy with the wife to pay much attention to the husband. He was considered to have extinguished himself for good. Miss Batchelor no longer regretted that he had no profession. To be the husband of the loveliest woman in Leicestershire was profession enough for any man.

By a further social paradox, Mrs. Nevill Tyson owed much of her present notoriety to her former obscurity. Lady Morley, had her temperament permitted, might have been as frisky or as risky as she pleased, without attracting unkind attention, much less censure. But, unless she combined the virtue of an angel with the manners of a district visitor, and contrived to walk circumspectly across the quicksands that separated her from "good society," a daughter of Mrs. Wilcox was condemned already. Mrs. Nevill Tyson had never walked circumspectly in her life. And Fate, that follows on the footsteps of the fool, was waiting, if not to catch Mrs.

Nevill Tyson tripping, at any rate to prove that she must trip.

At first Fate merely willed that Sir Peter should take a journey up to town. Sir Peter's serviceable tweed suit, that had lasted him a good five years, was beginning to go at the corners. We know Stanistreet's opinion of Sir Peter's taste in dress; it was only a coarser expression of the views held by his wife. But for her frank and friendly criticism, Sir Peter, holding change in abhorrence, would have worn that tweed suit another five years at the very least.

"It's a capital suit," said he.

"Perfectly disgraceful," said she. "Look at your elbow."

"Ordinary wear and tear."

"Particularly tear." And while she was speaking Sir Peter had rubbed the worn place into a jagged hole. Sir Peter sighed. He was much attached to that tweed suit; it knew his ways, and had adapted itself to all the little eccentricities of his figure. After five years there is a certain intimacy between a

man and his suit. However, there was no blinking the fact—the suit was doomed. Sir Peter's man seized the occasion for a general overhauling of his master's wardrobe, with the result that Sir Peter had to go up by an early train the next morning to consult Mr. Vance, his tailor.

Sir Peter was being measured up and down and all round him, while Mr. Vance stood by, note-book in hand, and took minutes of his case.

"A little wider round the waist, Vance, since you made my first coat for me thirty years ago."

Sir Peter was swaying on his toes, and supporting himself by a finger-tip laid on the shoulder of Vance's man.

"Not quite so long ago as that, Sir Peter."

"Must be, must be; you've been here more than thirty years."

Sir Peter prided himself on his memory, and was a stickler for the actual fact.

"I'm afraid not, sir." The voice of Vance was charged with melancholy and delicate

regret. "We were only Binks & Co. in those days."

"Nonsense. Why, you measured me yourself, Vance."

"An impossibility, sir."

Mr. Vance leaned against a pillar of cloth, like one requiring support in a very painful situation. It was agony for him to contradict Sir Peter. But truth is great. It prevailed.

"I was in the City then, sir, serving my time at Tyson's."

He dropped his eyes. He had crushed Sir Peter with proof, but he was too polite to be a witness of his discomfiture.

"Tyson's—Tyson's." Sir Peter's tongue uttered the name mechanically. His mind no longer followed Vance; it was busy with the loveliest woman in Leicestershire.

Mr. Vance smiled. "I daresay they know that name pretty well in your county, sir."

"The name," said Sir Peter, blushing a little at his own thoughts, "the name is not uncommon."

"It's the same family, though, sir."

"Really——" Sir Peter was a little startled this time—"you don't mean to say so?"

"Yes. It was a small firm, was Tyson's. But they're big people, I fancy, by now. Old Mr. Tyson left 'em and set up by himself in the wholesale business in Birmingham. He made a mint o' money. I understand he bought one of the best properties in your county; is that so, sir?"

If Mr. Vance had not made coats for Sir Peter for thirty years, he had made them for twenty-five or thereabouts, and he was privileged to gossip.

"Yes, yes, Thorneytoft. Very good property. And a very good sort too, old Mr. Tyson."

"A little peculiar, I'm told."

"Well—perhaps. I had not much acquaintance with the old man myself, but he was very generally respected. I know his nephew, Mr. Nevill Tyson—slightly."

Sir Peter would have died rather than ask

a direct question, but he was wildly curious as to Mr. Nevill Tyson's antecedents.

An illuminating smile spread over Mr. Vance's face.

"I remember *him* when he was a youngster. His father chucked the business, and set up as a Baptist minister—a Particular Baptist."

"Indeed."

"An uncommonly clever fellow, Nevill Tyson; sharp as needles. But they couldn't bring him up to the business, nor the ministry."

"Hardly good enough for him, I should imagine."

"Well—no. It wasn't a house with any standing in his time. He'd got ideas in his head, too. Nothing but a 'Varsity education suited his book."

"Ah, that always tells."

"His father was very much against it. He knew the young rascal. And just when he was at the top of the tree, as you may say, sure enough he made off—goodness knows where."

"Lived abroad a great deal, I believe." Sir Peter was anxious to throw a vaguely charitable light on his neighbor's escapades.

"Got into some scrape about a woman, I fancy. Anyhow he left a pile of debts behind him, and the old man ruined himself paying them."

Bristling with curiosity, Sir Peter endeavored to look detached. But at this point Mr. Vance, remembering, perhaps, that Mr. Nevill Tyson was a great man in his customer's county, and chilled a little by Sir Peter's manner, checked the flow of his reminiscences. "He was a wild young scamp—another two inches round the waist, sir—but I daresay he's settled down steady enough by this time."

"No doubt he has," said Sir Peter, a little loftily. He was disgusted with Vance.

But though Vance's conduct was disgusting, after all he had told him what he was dying to know. The antecedents of old Tyson of Thorneytoft had been wrapped in a dull

mystery which nobody had ever taken the trouble to penetrate. He had been in business —that much was known; and as he was highly respectable, it was concluded that his business had been highly respectable too. And then he had retired for ten years before he came to Thorneytoft. Those ten years might be considered a season of purification before entering on his solemn career as a country gentleman. Old Tyson had cut himself adrift from his own origins. And as the years went on he wrapped himself closer in his impenetrable garment of respectability; he was only Mr. Tyson, the gentle cultivator of orchids, until, gradually receding from view, he became a presence, a myth, a name. But when the amazing Mr. Nevill Tyson dashed into his uncle's place, he drew all eyes on him by the very unexpectedness of his advent. And now it seemed that Tyson, the cosmopolitan adventurer, the magnificent social bandit who trampled, so to speak, on the orchids of respectability, and rode rough-shod over the sleek traditions of Thorneytoft, was after all

nothing better than a little City tailor's son.

Of course it didn't matter in the very least. A man's a man for all that; but when the man, in his brilliant oratorical way, has intimated that you don't ride straight, and that you funk your fences, you may be forgiven if you smile a sly private smile at his expense.

And Sir Peter did more than smile, he laughed.

"So that was the goose that laid the golden eggs?" (Ha, ha! Sir Peter had made a joke.)

He went home merrily at the end of the week in his new clothes with his new idea; and as he sat in the train he kept turning that little bit of gossip over and over, and tasting it. It lasted him all the way from St. Pancras to Drayton Parva. Sir Peter did not greatly care for women's gossip; but he liked his own. And really the provocation had been intense. It was tit for tat, *quid pro quo,* what was sauce for the goose—the goose

again! Ha! ha! ha! It was a good thing for Sir Peter that Vance had given him another two inches round the waist.

Now, to do Sir Peter justice, he had meant to keep that little bit of gossip entirely to himself, for solitary gloating over and nibbling. But when an old gentleman has spent all his life uttering melancholy platitudes, and is suddenly delivered of a joke—of two jokes—it is a little hard to expect him to hide his light under a bushel. He could have buried scandal in his breast forever, but to put an extinguisher on the sparks of his playful fancy—no, these things are beyond a man's control. And as the idea of the goose, with all its subtle humor, sank deeper and deeper into Sir Peter's mind, he was irresistibly tempted to impart it to Lady Morley (in strict confidence). Such a joke as that ought not to be kept to himself to live and die with him; it would hardly be kind to Lady Morley. She would appreciate it.

She did appreciate it. So did Miss Batchelor, to whom she also told the story (in strict

confidence). So did everybody whom Miss Batchelor may or may not have confided in. And when the thing became public property, Sir Peter wished he had restrained his sense of humor.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWARDS "THE CROSS-ROADS"

It was the beginning of the hunting season, and with the hunting season Louis Stanistreet reappeared on the scene. He stayed at Thorneytoft as usual. Tyson had just bought a new hunter, a remarkable animal. It fell away suddenly in the hind-quarters; it had a neck like a giraffe and legs like a spider; but it could jump, if not very like a horse, very like a kangaroo. This creature struck wonder and terror into the soul of the hunt. At the first meet of the season Stanistreet, the Master, and Sir Peter drew up by one accord to watch the antics of Tyson and his kangaroo.

"By Jove! where does your friend pick up his hunters?" asked the Master.

"If you ask me," said Stanistreet, "I should say he buys them by the yard."

Sir Peter smiled. The Master stroked his mustache and meditated. There was a malignity about Stanistreet's humor conceivable enough—if there was any truth in history. It struck Stanistreet that his feeble jest met with an amount of attention out of all proportion to its merits. Sir Peter was the first to recover himself.

"Your friend may buy his horses by the yard, but he doesn't ride like a tailor. He rides like a man. Look at him—look at him!"

This was generous of Sir Peter, considering what Tyson had said about *his* riding. But for all his love of gossip Sir Peter was a gentleman, and that goose weighed heavily on his conscience. The reproof he had just administered to Stanistreet relieved him wonderfully.

Stanistreet was at a loss to understand the old fellow's caustic tone. Over billiards that night Tyson enlightened him.

Louis had been in a good temper all day; and his high spirits had infected Mrs. Nevill Tyson, a fact which, you may be sure, was

not set down to her credit by those who noticed it.

"I heard your riding praised this morning, Ty," said he, beaming with beneficence. They were alone.

"Ha!" said Tyson, "did you?"

"Rather. Binfield was asking where you picked your hunters up—got his eye on the kangaroo, I fancy. I ventured to suggest, in my agreeable way, that you bought them by the yard."

Tyson looked furious. Louis went on, unconscious of his doom. "Old Morley went for me like a lunatic—said you didn't ride like a tailor, you rode like a *man*. Queer old buffer, Morley—couldn't think what was the matter with him."

Tyson laid down his cue and held Stanistreet with a leveling gaze.

"Look here, Stanistreet," said he, "I've stood a good deal, but if you think I'm going to stand that, you're a greater fool than I took you for. What the hell do you mean by telling everybody about my private affairs?"

"My dear Tyson, a man who rides to hounds regularly on a kangaroo has no private affairs, he is, *ipso facto,* a public character." He threw back his head and shouted his laughter. "You've built yourself an everlasting name."

"Oh, no doubt. If Morley knows it everybody knows it. You might just as well confide in the town-crier." He sat down and pressed his hands to his forehead.

"This," he said bitterly, "accounts for everything."

Stanistreet stared at him in hopeless bewilderment. "What *is* the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I'm not going to kick you out of the house. I only ask you, so long as you are in it, to mind your own business."

"I can't. I haven't any business." No one could be more exasperating than the guileless Louis. Tyson darted another glance at him that was quite fiendish in its ferocity, and flung himself on the sofa. Sprawling there with his hands in his pockets, he remarked with freezing politeness, "I don't say

much, Stanistreet, but I think a damned deal."

"My dear Orlando Furioso, surely a harmless jest——"

"So you think it funny, do you, to tell these people that my father was a tailor? It wouldn't be funny if it was false; but as it happens to be true, it's simply stupid."

"I never said your father was a tailor."

"Don't trouble yourself to lie about it. He *was* a tailor. The minuteness of his business only added to the enormity of his crime. He was born in an attic on a pile of old breeches. He was a damned dissenter—called himself a Particular Baptist. He kept a stinking slop-shop in Bishopsgate Street, and a still more stinking schism-shop in Shoreditch."

("Why the devil shouldn't he?" murmured Louis.)

"Salvation free, gratis, for nothing, and five per cent. discount for ready money."

Louis was amused, but profoundly uncomfortable. This particular detail of Tyson's biography was not one of the things he knew;

if it had been, he would naturally have avoided the most distant allusion to it. As it happened, in his ignorance he seemed to have been perpetually blundering up against the circumstance. He went on clumsily enough —"If it was, I didn't know it, and if I had known it, it wouldn't have interested me in the least. *You* interest me; you are, and always will be, unique."

"You're an awful fool, Stanistreet. By your own admission Morley is acquainted with this charming romance."

"What if he is?"

"The inference is obvious. You told him."

"Good God! If I did, do you suppose that Morley or any one else would care? Does anybody care what another fellow's father was? As a matter of fact I neither knew nor cared. But for your own genius for autobiography I should never have heard of it."

"That's odd, considering that you've made capital out of it ever since I knew you. It supplied the point of all your witticisms that

weren't failures. I assure you your delicate humor was not lost on me."

"Considering that I've known you for at least twenty years, those jokes must have worn a little—er—threadbare. I'm extremely sorry for these—these breaches of etiquette. I shall do my best to repair them. That's a specimen of the thing you mean, I imagine?" From sheer nervousness Louis did what was generally the best thing to do after any little squabble with Tyson. He laughed,

Unfortunately this time Tyson was in no mood for laughter. The plebeian was uppermost in him. His wrongs rankled in him like a hereditary taint; this absurd quarrel with Stanistreet was a skirmish in the blood-feud of class against class. Tyson was morbidly sensitive on the subject of his birth, but latterly he had almost forgotten it. It had become an insignificant episode in the long roll of his epic past. Now for the first time for years it was recalled to him with a rude shock.

How real it was too! As he thought of it he was back in the stifling little shop.

Faugh! How it reeked of shoddy! Back in the whitewashed chapel, hot with the fumes of gas and fervent humanity. He heard the hymn sung to a rollicking tune:—

"I am so glad that my Father in heaven
Tells of His love in the book He has given.

. . .

I am so glad that Jesus loves me,
Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me,
I am so glad that Jesus loves me," &c.

The hateful measure rang in his ears, racking his nerves and brain. He could feel all the agony of his fierce revolting youth. The very torment of it had been a spur to his ambition. He swore (young Tyson was always swearing) that he would raise himself out of all that; he would distinguish himself at any cost. (As a matter of fact the cost was borne by the Baptist minister.) The world (represented then by his tutor and a few undergraduates), the world that he suspected of looking down on him, or more intolerable still, of patronizing him, should be compelled to admire him. And the world, being young and generous, did admire him without any strong

compulsion. At Oxford the City tailor's son scribbled, talked, debated furiously; the excited utterance of the man of the people, naked and unashamed, passed for the insolence of the aristocrat of letters. He crowned himself with *kudos*. How the beggars shouted when he got up to speak! He could hear them now. How they believed in him! Young Tyson was a splendid fellow; he could do anything he chose—knock you off a leading article or lead a forlorn hope. In time he began to be rather proud of his origin; it showed up his pluck, his grit, the stuff he was made of. He owed everything to himself.

And that last year when he let himself go altogether—there again his origin told. He had flung himself into dissipation in the spirit of dissent. His passions were the passions of Demos, violent and revolutionary. Tyson the Baptist minister had despised the world, vituperated the flesh, stamped on it and stifled it under his decent broadcloth. If it had any rights he denied them. Therefore in the person of his son they reasserted their claim;

and young Tyson paid it honorably and conscientiously to the full. In a year's time he knew enough of the world and the lust of it to satisfy the corrupt affections of generations of Baptist ministers, with the result that his university career was suddenly, mysteriously cut short. He had made too many experiments with life.

After that his life had been all experiments, most of them failures. But they served to separate him forever from his place and his people, from all the hateful humiliating past. He could still say that he owed everything to himself.

Then his uncle's death gave him the means of realizing his supreme ambition. By that time he had forgotten that he ever had an uncle. His family had effaced itself. Backed by an estate and a good income, there was no reason why its last surviving member should not be a conspicuous social success. Well, it seemed that he was a conspicuous social failure.

He owed that to Stanistreet, curse him!

curse him! His brain still reeled, and he roused himself with difficulty from his retrospective dream. When he spoke again it was with the conscious incisiveness of a drunken man trying hard to control his speech.

"Would you mind telling me who you've told this story to? Lady Morley, for one. My wife," he raised his voice in his excitement, "my wife, I suppose, for another?"

Stanistreet had every reason for not wanting to quarrel with Tyson. He liked a country house that he could run down to when he chose; he liked a good mount; he liked a faultless billiard-table; and oddly enough, with all his faults he liked Nevill Tyson. And he had a stronger motive now. Consciously or unconsciously he felt that his friendship for Tyson was a safeguard. A safeguard against —he hardly knew what. But the idea of Mrs. Nevill Tyson was like fire to his dry mood. His brain flared up all in a moment, though his tongue spoke coolly enough.

"I swear I never did anything of the sort. I haven't seen your wife for ages—till to-

night. We don't correspond. If we did"—he stopped suddenly—"if I did that sort of thing at all Mrs. Tyson is the very last person——"

"Oblige me by keeping her name out of it."

Tyson's voice carried far, through the door and across the passage, penetrating to Pinker in his pantry.

"I didn't introduce it."

"All right. I'm not asking you to lie again. No doubt everybody knows the facts by this time. I'm going to turn the lights out."

Stanistreet pulled himself together with a shrug. If any other man had hinted to him, in the most graceful and allegorical manner, that he lied, it would have been better for that man if he had not spoken. But he forgave Tyson many things, and for many reasons, one of these, perhaps, being a certain shamefaced consciousness touching Tyson's wife.

"By the way," said he, "are you going to keep this up very much longer? It's getting rather monotonous."

Tyson turned and paused with his hand on the door-knob. He snarled, showing his teeth like an angry cur, irritated beyond endurance.

"If you mean, am I going to take your word for that—frankly, I am not."

He flung the door open and strode out.

Stanistreet followed him.

"I think, Tyson," said he, "if I want to catch that early train to-morrow, I'd better take my things over to 'The Cross-Roads' to-night."

"Just as you like."

So Stanistreet betook himself to "The Cross-Roads."

CHAPTER IX

AN UNNATURAL MOTHER

NEXT morning a rumor set out from three distinct centers, Thorneytoft, Meriden, and "The Cross-Roads," to the effect that Tyson had quarreled seriously with Stanistreet. His wife, as might be imagined, was the cause. After a hot dispute, in which her name had been rather freely bandied about, it seems that Tyson had picked the Captain up by the scruff of the neck and tumbled him out of the house.

By the evening the scandal was blazing like a fire.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson was undoubtedly a benefactor to her small public. She had roused the intelligence of Drayton Parva as it had never been roused before. Conjecture followed furtively on her footsteps, and inference met her and stared her in the face. No

been the cause of his disaster. That was only the last of a long train of undignified circumstances which had made his position in Drayton Parva insupportable; it lent a little more point to the innuendo on every tongue, the intelligence in every eye. He was sick with disgust, and consumed with the desire to get out of it all, to cut Drayton Parva for good. The accursed place was trying to stare him out of countenance. Everywhere he turned there was a stare: it was on the villagers' faces, behind Miss Batchelor's eye-glass, on the bare fields with their sunken fences, and on that abominable bald-faced house of his.

No doubt this was the secret of the business that took Tyson up to town so many times that winter. He said nothing to his wife that could account for his frequent absence, but she believed that he was looking about for the long-promised flat; and when he remarked casually one morning that he meant to leave Thorneytoft in the spring she was not surprised. Neither was Mrs. Wilcox. The flat had appeared rather often in her

conversation of late. Mrs. Wilcox was dimly, fitfully aware of the state of public opinion; but it did not disturb her in the least. She at once assumed the smile and the attitude of Hope; she smiled on her son-in-law's aberrations as she smiled on the ways of the universe at large, and for the same reason, that the one was about as intelligible as the other. She went about paying visits, and in the course of conversation gave people to understand that Mr. Tyson's residence in Drayton had been something of a concession on his part from the first. So large a landowner had a great many tiresome claims and obligations, as well as a position to keep up in his county; but there could be no doubt that Nevill was quite lost in the place, and that the true sphere of his activity was town. Mrs. Wilcox's taste for vague and ample phrases was extremely convenient at times.

If his wife was the last person to be consulted in Tyson's arrangements, it may be supposed that no great thought was taken for

his son and heir. Not that the little creature would have been much affected by any change in his surroundings; he was too profoundly indifferent to the world. It had taken all the delicious tumult of the spring, all the flaming show of summer, to move him to a few pitiful smiles. He had none of the healthy infant's passion and lusty grasp of life; he seemed to touch it as he had touched his mother's breasts, delicately, tentatively, with some foregone fastidious sense of its illusion. What little interest he had ever taken in the thing declined perceptibly with autumn, when he became too deeply engrossed with the revolutions taking place in his sad little body to care much for anything that went on outside it.

Hitherto he had not had to suffer from the neglect of servants. He was so delicate from his birth that his mother had been strongly advised to keep on the trained nurse till he was a year old. But Mrs. Nevill Tyson knew better than that. For some reason she had taken a dislike to her trained nurse; perhaps

she was a little bit afraid of the professional severity which had so often held in check her fits of hysterical passion. Aided by Mrs. Wilcox and her own intuitions, after rejecting a dozen candidates on the ground of youth and frivolity, she chose a woman with calm blue eyes and a manner that inspired confidence. Swinny, engaged at an enormous salary, had absolute authority in the nursery. And if it had been possible to entertain a doubt as to this excellent woman's worth, the fact that she had kept the Tyson baby alive so long was sufficient testimonial to her capabilities.

But Swinny was in love—in love with Pinker. And to be in love with Pinker was to live in a perfect delirium of hopes and fears. No sooner was Swinny delivered over to the ministers of love, who dealt with her after their will, than Baby too agonized and languished. His food ceased to nourish him, his body wasted. They bought a cow for his sole use and benefit, and guarded it like a sacred animal but to no purpose. He drank

of its milk and grew thinner than ever. Strange furrows began to appear on his tiny face, with shadows and a transparent tinge like the blue of skim-milk. As the pure air of Drayton did so little for him, Mrs. Nevill Tyson wondered how he would bear the change to London.

"Shall I take him, Nevill?" she asked.

"Take him if you like," was the reply. "But you might as well poison the little beast at home while you're about it."

So it was an understood thing that when Mr. and Mrs. Nevill Tyson settled in town, Baby was to be left behind at Thorneytoft for the good of his health. It was his father's proposal, and his mother agreed to it in silence.

Her indifference roused the severest comments in the household. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was an unnatural mother. From the day she weaned him, no one had ever seen her caress the child. She handled him with a touch as light and fleeting as his own; her lips seemed to shrink from contact with his pure soft skin. There could be no doubt of it, Mrs. Nevill

Tyson's behavior was that of a guilty woman —guilty in will at any rate, if not in deed.

A shuddering whisper went through the house; it became a murmur, and the murmur became an articulate, unmistakable voice. The servants were sitting in judgment on her. Swinny spoke from the height of a lofty morality; Pinker, being a footman of the world, took a humorous, not to say cynical view, which pained Swinny. Such a view could never have been taken by one whose affections were deeply engaged.

The conclusions arrived at in the servants' hall soon received a remarkable confirmation.

It was on a Monday. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was seen to come down to breakfast in an unusually cheerful frame of mind. Tyson was away; he had been up in town for three weeks, and was expected home that evening. She looked for letters. There were two—one from the master of the house; one also from Stanistreet, placed undermost by the discreet Pinker. The same thoughtful observer of character noticed that his mistress blushed

and put her letters aside instead of reading them at once. At ten Swinny came into the breakfast-room, bearing Baby. This was the custom of the house. By courtesy the most unnatural mother may be credited with a wish to see her child once a day.

This morning Mrs. Nevill Tyson did not so much as raise her head. She was sitting by the fire in her usual drooping guilty attitude. Swinny noticed that the hearth was strewn with the fragments of torn letters. She put the baby down on a rug by the window, and left his mother alone with him to see what she would do.

She did nothing. Baby lay on the floor sucking his little claw-like fingers, and stirring feebly in the sun. Mrs. Nevill Tyson continued to gaze abstractedly at nothing. When Swinny came back after a judicious interval, he was still lying there, and she still sitting as before. She had not moved an inch. How did Swinny know that? Why, the tail of Mrs. Tyson's dress was touching the exact spot on the carpet it had touched

before. (Swinny had made a note of the pattern.) And the child might have cried himself into fits before she'd have stirred hand or foot to comfort him. Baby found himself caught up in a rapture and strained to his faithful Swinny's breast. Whereupon he cried. He had been happier lying in the sun.

Swinny turned round to the motionless figure by the hearth, and held the child well up in her arms.

"Baby thinks that his mamma would like to see him," said Swinny, in an insinuating manner.

A hard melancholy voice answered, "I don't want to see him. I don't want to see him any more."

All the same Mrs. Nevill Tyson turned and looked after him as he was carried through the doorway. She could just see the downy back of his innocent head, and his ridiculous frock bulging roundly over the nurse's arm. But whether she was thinking of him at that moment God only knows.

The household was informed that its master would not return that evening after all; that no date was fixed for his coming.

Later on Pinker, the guardian of the hearth, finding those fragments of letters tried to put them together again. Tyson's letter it was impossible to restore. It had been torn to atoms in a vicious fury of destruction. But by great good luck Stanistreet's (a mere note) had been more tenderly dealt with. It was torn in four neat pieces; the text, though corrupt, was fairly legible, and left little to the ingenuity of the scholiast. The Captain was staying in the neighborhood. He proposed to call on Mrs. Nevill Tyson. Would she be at home on Wednesday afternoon? Now, to Pinker's certain knowledge, Mrs. Nevill Tyson had taken the letters to the post herself that morning. That meant secrecy, and secrecy meant mischief.

How was she going to get through the next two days? This was provided for. Baby was a bad sleeper. That night he cried as he

had never cried before. Not violently; he was too weak for that, but with a sound like the tongue-tied whimper of some tiny animal. Swinny had slept through worse noise many a night. Now he cried from midnight to cock-crow; and on Tuesday morning Swinny was crying too. He had had one of his "little attacks," after which he began to show signs of rapid wasting.

He had got something which Mrs. Nevill Tyson had never heard of—"marasmus," the doctor called it. She hoped it was nothing very bad.

Then the truth came out piecemeal, through Swinny's confession and the witness of her fellow-servants. The wretched woman's movements had been wholly determined by the movements of Pinker; and she had been in the habit of leaving the child in the servants' hall, where the cook, being an affectionate motherly woman, made much of him, and fed him with strange food. He had had an "attack" the last time she did this, and Swinny, who valued her place for more rea-

sons than one, had been afraid to say anything about it. Preoccupied with her great passion, she had been insensible to the signs of sickness that showed themselves from day to day. In other words, there had been shameful, pitiful neglect.

Terrified and repentant, Swinny confessed, and became faithful again. She sat up all night with the child wrapped in blankets in her lap. She left nothing for his mother to do but to sit and look at him, or go softly to and fro, warming blankets. (It was odd, but Mrs. Nevill Tyson never questioned the woman's right to exclusive possession of the child.) She had written to Nevill by the first post to tell him of his son's illness. That gave him time to answer the same night.

Wednesday came. There was no answer to her letter; and the baby was worse. The doctor doubted if he would pull through.

Mrs. Wilcox was asked to break the news to her daughter. She literally broke it. That is to say, she presented it in such disjointed fragments that it would have puzzled a wiser

head than Mrs. Nevill Tyson's to make out the truth. Mrs. Wilcox had been much distressed by Molly's strange indifference to her maternal claims; but when you came to think of it, it was a very good thing that she had not cared more for the child, if she was not to keep him. All the same, Mrs. Wilcox knew that she had an extremely disagreeable task to perform.

They were in the porch at Thorneytoft, the bare white porch that stared out over the fields, and down the great granite road to London. As Mrs. Nevill Tyson listened she leaned against the wall, with her hands clasped in front or her and her head thrown back to stop her tears from falling. Her throat shook. She was so young—only a child herself! A broad shaft of sunshine covered her small figure; her red dress glowed in the living light. Looking at her, a pathetic idea came to Mrs. Wilcox. "You never had a frock that became you more," she murmured between two sighs. Mrs. Nevill Tyson heard neither murmur nor sighs. And yet her

senses did their work. For years afterwards she remembered that some one was standing there in the bright sunshine, dressed in a red gown, some one who answered when she was spoken to; but that she—she—stood apart in her misery and was dumb.

"I don't understand," she said at last. "Why can't you say what you mean? *Is* there danger?"

Mrs. Wilcox looked uncomfortable. "Yes, there is *some* danger. But while there is life there is—hope."

"If there is danger——" she paused, looking away toward the long highroad, "if there *is* danger, I shall send for Nevill. He will come."

She telegraphed: "Baby dangerously ill. Come at once."

She waited feverishly for an answer. There was none. To the horror of the household, she gave orders that when Captain Stanistreet called she would see him. As she could not tear herself from the baby, there was nothing for it but to bring Stanistreet to her.

To his intense astonishment Louis was led up into a wide bare room on the third story. He was in that mood when we are struck with the unconscious symbolism of things. By the high fire-guard, the walls covered with cheerful oleographs, the toys piled in the corner, he knew that this was the abode of innocence, a child's nursery. The place was flooded with sunshine. A woman sat by the fire with a small yellowish bundle in her lap. Opposite her sat Mrs. Nevill Tyson, with her eyes fixed on the bundle. She looked up in Stanistreet's face as he came in, but held out no hand.

"Louis," she whispered hoarsely when he was near, "where's Nevill?"

"In London."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"Is he coming?"

"I don't know. I didn't speak to him. I —I was in a hurry."

She had turned her head. Her eyes never wandered from that small yellowish bundle. Up to the last she had let it lie on the nurse's

knee. She had not dared to take it; perhaps she felt she was unworthy. He followed her gaze.

"He's very ill," said she. "Look at him."

The nurse moved a fold of blanket from the child's face, and Stanistreet gazed at Tyson's son. He tried to speak.

"Sh—sh—" whispered Mrs. Nevill Tyson. "He's sleeping."

"Dying, sir," muttered the nurse. The woman drew in her knees, tightening her hold on the child. Her face was stained with tears. (She had loved the baby before she loved Pinker. Remorse moved her and righteous indignation.) Mrs. Nevill Tyson's nostrils twitched; deep black rings were round her eyes. Passion and hunger were in them, but there were no tears.

And as Stanistreet looked from one woman to the other, he understood. He picked up the bundle and removed it to its mother's knee. All her soul passed into the look wherewith she thanked him. Swinny, tear-stained but

inexorable, stood aloof, like rigid Justice, weighing her mistress in the balance.

"He's dying, Molly," he said gently.

She shook her head. "No; he's not dying. God isn't cruel. He won't let him die."

She turned the child's face to her breast, hoping perhaps that his hands would move in the old delicious way.

He did not stir, and she laid him on his back again and looked at him. His lips and the hollows under his eyes were blue. The collapse had come. Louis knelt down and put his hand over the tiny heart.

A spasm passed over the baby's face, simulating a smile. Then Mrs. Nevill Tyson fell to smiling too.

"See"—she said.

But Stanistreet had seen enough. He rose from his knees and left her.

CHAPTER X

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

WELL, if she wouldn't look at him when he was alive, she might show some feeling now he's dead. (So Justice.)

She showed no feeling. That is to say, none perceptible to the eyes of Justice.

On Thursday morning she heard from Tyson. A short note: "I am more sorry than words can say. I wish I could be with you, but I'm kept in this infernal place till the beginning of next week. I hope the little man will pull through. Take care of yourself," and the usual formula.

She sat down and wrote a telegram, brutally brief, as telegrams must be. "Died yesterday. Funeral Friday, two o'clock. Can you come?"

Two hours later the answer came in one

word—"Impossible." She flushed violently and set her face like a flint.

But she showed no feeling. None when they screwed the baby into a box lined with white satin; none when they lowered him into his grave and piled flowers and earth upon him; none when, as they drove home from the funeral, Mrs. Wilcox's pent-up emotions broke loose in a torrent of words.

Having gone through so much, it occurred to Mrs. Wilcox that the time had now come to look a little on the bright side of things. "Well," she began with a faint perfunctory sigh, "I am thankful we've had a fine day. The sunshine makes one hope. You'll remember, Molly, it was just the same at your poor father's funeral. We had a sudden gleam of sunlight between the showers. There *were* showers, for my new crape was ruined. And in December we might have had snow or pouring rain—so bad for the clergyman—and gentlemen, if they take their hats off. Some don't; and very sensible too. They catch such awful colds at funerals, standing about in

their wet feet, and no one likes to be the first to put up an umbrella. I didn't see Captain Stanistreet in the church—did you?—nor yet at the grave. Rather strange of him. I think under the circumstances he might have come —Nevill's oldest friend. Did you know Miss Batchelor was in church? She was. Not in the chancel—away at the back. You couldn't see her. I think it showed very nice feeling in her to come, and to send those lovely roses too—from her own greenhouse. I must say everybody has been most kind, and there wasn't a hitch in the arrangements. I often think you have only to be in real trouble to know who your true friends are. I'm sure the sympathy—and the flowers—you wouldn't have known he was lying in his little coffin—and Swinny—that woman *has* feeling. I saw her—sobbing as if her heart would break. We misjudged her, Molly, we did indeed. Really, her devotion at the last——"

At this point Molly turned her back on her mother and looked out of the window. They were going up the village street now, and a

hard tearless face was presented to a highly emotional group of spectators. All Drayton Parva was alive to the fact that Mrs. Nevill Tyson was an unnatural mother. "I'm sure the villagers did everything they could to show their respect. There was Pinker's father, and Ashby, at the gate—with their hats off. And for Baby—poor little darling, if he only knew! Well, it shows what they think of you and Nevill. You've got mud on your skirt, dear—off the wheel getting into the carriage. Pinker should have been more careful. How wise you were to get that good serge. It's everlasting. At any rate it'll last you as long as you want it. Ah-h! My poor child"—she laid her hand on Mrs. Nevill Tyson's averted shoulder—"you'll *not* fret, will you, now? No—you're too brave, I know. The more I think of it the more I feel that it's all for the best. Think—if he'd lived to be older you'd have cared more, and it would have been harder then—when he was running about and playing. You can't have the same feeling for a little baby. And he was so deli-

cate, too, you really couldn't have wished it. He had your father's constitution. And if you'd tried to teach him anything, he'd just have got water on the brain. Ah—h—h—h! Depend upon it, it'll bring you and Nevill closer together."

A white rosebud, dropped on the back seat, marked the place where the coffin had rested. Mrs. Nevill Tyson picked it up and crushed it in her hand.

"Yes. I know you've had your little tiffs lately. Somebody said, 'It's blessings on the falling out that all the more endears.' Who was it? I don't know how it goes on; I've such a head for poetry. They kissed—kissed —kissed. Whoever was it now? Oh! It was poor dear Mrs. Browning. They kissed again—with tears. Ah! Are you cold, love?"

"No—no."

"I thought you shivered."

From Drayton parish church Thorneytoft is a long drive, and from beginning to end of it Mrs. Wilcox had never ceased talking. At last they reached home. The blinds were

drawn up again in the front of the house; it was staring with all its windows.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson lingered till she saw her mother half-way upstairs, then she turned into the library. The room was only used by Tyson; she would be certain to be alone there.

The silence sank into her brain like an anæsthetic after torture. She had closed the door before she realized that she was not alone.

Somebody was sitting writing at the table in the window. His head was bent low over his hands, so that she could not see it well; but at the first sight of his back and shoulders she thought it was Tyson.

It was Stanistreet.

He turned and started when he saw her.

"Forgive me," said he, "I—I'm leaving to-morrow, and I was just writing a note to you. I was going—I did not expect to see you—they told me——"

His manner was nervous and confused and he broke off suddenly. She sat down in the chair he had just left, and took off her gloves and her hat. She leaned her elbow on the

table and her head upon her hand. "Don't go," she said. "I only came in here to get away—to think. I was afraid of being talked to. But I'd rather you didn't go." She looked away from him. "Have you heard from Nevill?"

"No."

"Do you think he's ill?"

"He wasn't ill when I saw him on Sunday."

"Then I wonder why he keeps away. You *don't* know, do you?"

"I do not. And I don't want to talk about him."

"No more do I!" she said fiercely. "I told him—and he doesn't care. He doesn't care!"

Her lips shook; her breast heaved; she hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, Louis, Louis, he's dead! And I said I didn't want to see him ever again!"

His hand was on the arm of her chair. "I'm so sorry," he said below his breath, guarding his tongue.

She had clutched his hand and dragged

herself to her feet. She was clinging to him almost, crying her heart out.

"I know," she said at last, "I know you care."

He trembled violently. In another minute he would have drawn her to him; he would have said the stupid, unutterable word. The thing had passed beyond his control. It had not happened by his will. She was Tyson's wife. Yes; and this was the third time he had been thrust into Tyson's place. Why was he always to be with or near this woman in these moments, in the throes of her mortal agony, in the divine passion of her motherhood, and now——?

Did she know? Did she know? She stopped crying suddenly, like a startled child. She looked down at the hand she held and frowned at it, as if it puzzled her.

The door opened. She loosed her hold and went from him, brushing past the astonished Pinker in her flight.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

Tyson returned by the end of the following week. He found his wife in the big hall. She was standing by the fireplace, with one foot on the curbstone of the hearth, the other lifted a little to the blaze. Her arms lay along the chimney-piece, her head drooped over them. Her back was towards him as he came in, and she did not turn at the sound of his footsteps. He went up to her, put his arm round her waist and led her gently into the library. She had started violently at his touch, but she made no resistance. He meant to kiss and comfort her.

"Darling," he said, "I was awfully cut up. Tell me about the poor little beggar."

He held her closer. His breath was like flame against her cheek. When he spoke he coughed—a short hard cough.

She pushed against his arm and broke from him. Then she turned. "Don't speak of him! Don't speak of him!"

"I won't, dear, if you'd rather not. Only don't think I didn't care."

"Don't tell me you cared!" She held her arms outstretched, the hands clenched. Her small body was tense with passion. "Don't tell me. It's a lie. You never cared. You hated him from the first. You kept me from him lest I should love him better than you. You would have taken me away and left him here. You were cruel. And you knew it. You stayed away because you knew it. You were afraid, and no wonder. I know why you did it. You thought I didn't love you. Was that the way to make me love you?"

"Molly," he said faintly, "I didn't know. I never thought you'd take it to heart that way. Come—" He held out his hand.

She too had said "Come." She remembered the answer: "Impossible."

"No," she said. "I won't. I can't. I don't want to have anything to do with you.

What were you doing all those days when he was dying?"

He slunk from her, conscience-stricken. "My dear Molly," he said, "I'm awfully sorry, but you're a damned little fool. You'd better hold your tongue before you say something you'll be sorry for."

"I'm going to hold my tongue. If I pleased myself I should never speak to you again."

Ah, she had said something very like that not long before.

He sighed heavily. Then he drew a chair up to the fire and lowered himself carefully into it. He was shivering.

"All right," he muttered between chattering teeth. "Get me some brandy, will you? You can do that without speaking."

"Nevill—what's the matter?"

"Nothing. I've got an infernally bad chill coming here, that's all."

She flew for the brandy.

Yes; there was no mistake about it. It was an infernally bad chill, and it saved him.

Whether Mrs. Wilcox was right or wrong

in her conjecture, the Tyson baby had shown infinite delicacy in retiring from a world where he had caused so many complications. He had done mischief enough in his short life, and I believe to the last Tyson owed the little beggar a grudge. He had spoiled the complexion of the loveliest woman in Leicestershire. At any rate Tyson thought he had. Other people perhaps knew better.

If she had been thin and pale before the baby's death, she was thinner and paler now. She had the look of a woman who carries a secret about with her. She trembled and blushed when you spoke to her. And when she had ceased to blush she took to dabbing on paint and powder. It was just like her folly to let everybody see she was pining. And the more she pined the more she painted. Ah, she might well hide her face!

Scandal may circulate for years before it comes to the ears of the persons most concerned in it; still, one could not help wondering how much Tyson knew. He was going to take her away, which was certainly very

wise of him. Poor man, she had made Leicestershire rather too hot to hold him.

He was always going up to London now, and people who had met him there hinted that the country gentleman had become a man about town. Still, you must not believe the half of what you hear; and supposing there was some truth in the report, why, what could you expect with a wife like that?

By March it was settled that they were to leave Thorneytoft and make London their headquarters. Tyson had taken a flat in Ridgmount Gardens. This, he said, was a good central position and handy for the theatres. At any rate, he could not afford a better one so long as that infernal estate swallowed up two-thirds of his income.

It looked as if they meant to make a clean sweep of their past. They began by making a clean sweep of the servants, from the kitchen-maid upwards. Here they were forestalled. Before it could come to his turn the thoughtful Pinker gave notice. His example was followed by Swinny the virtuous.

Swinny, as it happened, was a niece of Farmer Ashby's, the same who saw Stanistreet driving with his arm round Mrs. Nevill Tyson's waist; she was first cousin to the landlord of "The Cross-Roads," where the Captain retired on the night of the quarrel, and she was sister to Miss Batchelor's maid. The scandal was all in the family. It was this circumstance, no doubt, that had given such color and consistency to the floating rumor.

Swinny, having regard to her testimonials, was not openly offensive. She told Tyson that she was sorry to leave a good master and mistress, but she never could abide the town. No more could Pinker. And she must go where there was a baby. Then Swinny, having shaken the dust of Thorneytoft from her virtuous feet, called on every member of her family, and told to each the same unvarying tale. She wasn't going to stay in a place where there were such goings on; it was as much as her character was worth. The gentlemen were after Mrs. Nevill Tyson from morning till night, you couldn't keep 'em

off—not that lot. She hadn't much to say to them, but she fair ran after the Captain—it was perfectly disgraceful. When Mr. Tyson sent him to the right-about, she waited till her husband's back was turned, then she wrote to him to come. And, as if nothing else would serve her, she had him up in the nursery when her little baby was dying. They were actually whispering the two of them, and making eyes at each other over the child's coffin. Why, Pinker, he caught 'em in the library the very day of the funeral. Oh, it wasn't the Captain's fault. She whistled and he came, that was all. So far Swinny.

Was that all?

On every face there was a tremendous query. But upon the whole it was concluded that Stanistreet at any rate had had regard to his friend's honor.

It is the last stone that kills; so, you see, there was a certain hesitation about hurling it. No educated person believes the evidence of servants. Besides, when it came to the point, one felt too sorry for Nevill Tyson to

make up one's mind to the worst. So far Miss Batchelor.

Ah, well, he took her away. The last that was seen of Mrs. Nevill Tyson in Leicestershire was a sad little figure, shrinking away in the corner of a railway carriage, nursing her guilty secret.

CHAPTER XII

A FLAT IN TOWN

THOUGH they had cut them dead lately, it must be confessed that some people found Drayton Parva a very dull place without Mr. and Mrs. Nevill Tyson. They heard about them sometimes from Sir Peter, who was now in Parliament; and from Miss Batchelor, after her flying visits to the Morleys' house in town. Stanistreet, by the way, had his headquarters somewhere in London; and in London Mrs. Nevill Tyson revived. She had begun all over again. She had got new clothes, new servants, and a new drawing-room. An absurd little drawing-room it was, too—all white paint, muslin draperies, and frivolous gim-crack furniture. A place, said Miss Batchelor, that it would have been dangerous to smoke a cigarette in. And if you would believe it, she had hung up Tyson's

sword over the couch in the dining-room, as a memorial of his deeds in the Soudan. So ridiculous, when everybody knew that he was nothing but a sort of volunteer (Miss Batchelor had had a brother in "the Service").

Having furnished her drawing-room, and hung up her husband's sword, Mrs. Nevill Tyson seems to have done nothing noteworthy, but to have sat down and waited for events.

She had not long to wait. By the end of the season she was alone in the flat. *He* had left her. She had no clue to his whereabouts; but, other people believed him to be living in another flat—not alone.

Drayton Parva was alive again with the scandal. Miss Batchelor, as became the intelligence of Drayton Parva, alone kept calm. She went about saying that she was not at all surprised to hear it. Miss Batchelor never was surprised at anything. She refused to take a part, to commit herself to a definite opinion. Human nature is a mixed matter, and in these cases there are generally faults

on both sides. Mrs. Nevill Tyson had been—certainly—very—indiscreet. It was indiscreet of her to go on living in that flat all by herself. Did Miss Batchelor think there was anything in that report about Captain Stanistreet? Well, if there wasn't something in it you would have thought she would have come back to Thorneytoft; her staying in town looked bad under the circumstances.

Poor Mrs. Nevill Tyson, every circumstance made a link in a chain of evidence whose ends were nowhere.

And, indeed, she was not left very long to herself.

But though Stanistreet was always hanging about Ridgmount Gardens, he was no nearer solving the problem that had perplexed him. And yet his views of women had undergone a change; he was not the same man who had discussed Molly Wilcox in the billiard-room at Thorneytoft three years ago. One thing he noticed which was new. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was not literary; but whenever he called now he always found her sitting with some book

in her hand, which she instantly hid behind the cushions of her chair. Stanistreet unearthed three of these volumes one day. They were "Barrack-Room Ballads," "With Gordon in the Soudan," "India: What it can Teach Us"—a work, if you please, on Vedic philosophy, annotated in pencil by Tyson. Now Stanistreet had brought "Barrack-Room Ballads" into the house; Stanistreet had been with Gordon in the Soudan; Stanistreet—no, Stanistreet had not been in India; but he might have been. He was immensely amused at the idea of Mrs. Nevill Tyson cultivating her mind. Poor little soul, how bored she must have been!

There could be no possible doubt about the boredom. Mrs. Nevill Tyson turned from reading to talking with obvious relief. Their conversation had taken a wider range lately; it was more intimate, and at the same time less embarrassing. He wondered how often she thought of that scene in the library at Thorneytoft; she had behaved ever since as if it had never happened. For one thing

Stanistreet was thankful—she had left off discussing Nevill with him. If she had ever been in ignorance, she now knew all that it concerned her to know. Not that she avoided the subject; on the contrary, it seemed to have floated into the vague region of general interest, where any chance current of thought might drift them to it. Stanistreet dreaded it; but she was continually brushing up against it, with a feathery lightness which made him marvel at the volatile character of her mind. Was it the clumsiness of a butterfly or the dexterity of a woman? Once or twice he thought he detected a certain reluctant shyness in approaching the subject directly. It was as if she regarded her affection for her husband as a youthful folly, and her marriage as a discreditable episode of which she was now ashamed.

On the other hand, she was always ready to talk about Stanistreet and his doings. She would listen for hours to his mess-room stories, his descriptions of the people and the places he had seen, the engagements he had

taken part in. For a whole evening one Sunday they had talked about nothing but fortification. Now it was impossible that Mrs. Nevill Tyson could be interested in fortification. As for Vedic philosophy, she cared for Brahma about as much as Stanistreet did for Brahms.

He was walking with her in Hyde Park; they had turned off into the path by the flower-beds on the Park Lane side. It was April, between six and seven in the evening, and, except for a few stragglers, they had the walk to themselves. Louis had been giving her the history of his first campaign in the Soudan, and she was listening with a dreamy, half-suppressed interest, which rose gradually to excitement. He sat down and drew on the gravel with the point of his walking-stick a rude map of the country, showing the course of the Nile and the line of march, with pebbles for stations, and bare patches for battlefields. He then began to trace out an extremely complicated plan of the campaign. She followed the movements of the walking-

stick with an intelligence which he would hardly have credited her with. And, indeed, it was no inconsiderable feat, seeing that for want of a finer instrument Louis's plan was hopelessly mixed up with his line of march and other matters.

"Was Nevill there?" she asked, casually, at the close of a spirited account of his last engagement.

"No. He was with the volunteers, farther south." He looked at her and her eyes dropped.

"Which is north and which is south?"

The walking-stick indicated the points of the compass.

"I see. And you were there in that great splodge in the middle. Go on. What did you do then?"

The walking-stick staggered in a wavering line eastwards. But before it could join the Nile, Mrs. Nevill Tyson had rubbed out the map, campaign and all, with the tips of her shoes.

"There's a park-keeper coming," said she,

"he'll wonder why we're making such a mess of his nice gravel-walk."

The park-keeper came, he looked at the gravel and frowned, he looked at Mrs. Nevill Tyson, smiled benignly, and passed on. Perhaps he wondered.

They got up and walked as far as the Corner, where they looked at the Achilles statue. Under the shadow of the pedestal Mrs. Nevill Tyson took a bunch of violets from her waistband.

"What are you going to do with that?" said Louis.

"I'm going to stick it in Achilles' buttonhole. Oh, I see, Achilles hasn't got a buttonhole. I must put it in yours then."

She put it in.

Louis's dark face flushed. "Why did you do that?"

"I did that—— Because you are a brave man, and I like brave men."

Still under the shadow of the pedestal, he took her by both hands and looked into her

eyes. "What are you going to do now?" said he.

"Nothing. We must go back. We have gone too far," said she.

"Too far?" He dropped her hands.

She smiled in the old ambiguous, maddening way. "Yes; much too far. We shall be late for dinner."

They turned back by the way they had come. Near the Marble Arch a small crowd was gathered round a poor street preacher with a raucous voice. They could hear him as they passed.

"We're all sinners," shouted the preacher. (They stopped and looked at each other with a faint smile. All sinners—that was what Nevill used to say, all sinners—or fools.) "We're all sinners, you and me, but Jesus can save us. 'E loves sinners. 'E bears their sins; your sins an' my sins, dear brethren; 'e bears the sins of the 'ole world. Why, that's wot 'e came inter the world for—to save sinners. Ter save 'em from death an' everlasting 'ell! That's wot Jesus does for sinners."

Oh, Molly, Molly, what has he done for fools?

He took her to Ridgmount Gardens, and left her at the door of the flat.

She was incomprehensible, this little Mrs. Tyson. But up till now his own state of mind had been plain. He knew where he was drifting; he had always known. But where she was drifting, or whether she was drifting at all, he did not know; that is to say, he was not sure. And up till now he had not tried very hard to make sure. He was a person of infinite tact, and could boast with some truth that he had never done an abrupt or clumsy thing. By this time his attitude of doubt had given a sort of metaphysical character to this interest of the senses; he was almost content to wait and let the world come round to him. It was to be supposed that Mrs. Nevill Tyson, being Mrs. Nevill Tyson, would have fathomed him long ago if he had been of the same clay as her engaging husband. He was of clay, no doubt, but it was not the same clay; and it was

impossible to say how much she knew or had divined; other women were no rule for her, or else—— No. One thing was certain, he would never have betrayed Tyson until Tyson had betrayed her. As it was, his relations with her were sufficiently abnormal to be exciting; it was not passion, it was a rush of minute sensations, swarming and swirling like a dance of fire-flies—an endless approach and flight.

After all, he would not have had it otherwise. The charm, he told himself, was in the levity of the situation. The thread by which she held him was so fine that it could be broken any day. There would be no pangs of conscience, no tears, no reproaches; no tyrannies of the heart and revolutions of the soul. It was to Mrs. Nevill Tyson's eternal credit that she made no claims. Clearly, when a tie can be broken to-morrow, there is no urgent necessity for breaking it to-day.

So in the afternoon Stanistreet called again at Ridgmount Gardens.

Whether or no Mrs. Nevill Tyson ignored the possibility of passion, she had the largest ideas of the scope and significance of friendship. She made no claims, but she exacted from Louis a multitude of small services for which he was held to be sufficiently repaid in smiles. Whether she knew it or not, she had grown dependent on him. She had always shown an affecting confidence in the integrity of masculine judgment, and she consulted him about her dividends and the pattern of her gowns with equally guileless reliance.

To-day he found her in a state of agitated perplexity. She put a letter into his hands. He was to read it; he might skip the first page, it was all about calico. There—that was what she meant.

The letter was from Mrs. Wilcox imploring her to go back to Drayton "till this little cloud blows over."

"I don't want to go to Drayton, to those people. They talk. I know they talk, and I don't like them. Besides, I want to stay

in London. Nobody knows me here except you."

"Do I know you?"

"Well, if you don't, you ought to—by now. I wonder if mother wants me. She might come here, though I'd rather she didn't. She talks too, you know; she doesn't mean to, but she can't help it. What I like about you is—you never talk."

"You won't let me."

"What ought I to do?" she asked helplessly. "Must I go?"

"No," said Louis emphatically. "Don't."

"Why not?"

He tossed the letter aside, and their eyes met.

"It would look like defeat."

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. WILCOX TO THE RESCUE

So Nevill Tyson had left his wife. This was the most exciting act in the drama that had entertained Drayton Parva for two years. He had brought down the house. Presently it seemed that Drayton Parva was not unprepared for the catastrophe. Miss Batchelor was sadly afraid that something of this sort had been going on for long enough. But she had not condemned Nevill Tyson wholesale and without a hearing; in these cases there are always faults on both sides. A man as much in love with his wife as he was would never have left her without some grounds. (I cannot think why Miss Batchelor, being so clever, didn't see through Tyson; but there is a point at which the cleverness of the cleverest woman ceases.) Anyhow, if Mrs. Nevill Tyson was as innocent as one was bound to

suppose, why did she not come back to Drayton, to her mother? That was the proper thing for her to do under the circumstances.

Have you ever sat by the seashore playing with pebbles in an idle mood? You are not aiming at anything, you are much too lazy to aim; but some god directs your arm, and, without thinking, you hit something that, ten to one, you never would have hit if you had thought about it. After that your peace is gone; you feel that you can never leave the spot till you have hit that particular object again, with deliberate intent. So Miss Batchelor, sitting by the shore of the great ocean of Truth, began by throwing stones aimlessly about; and other people (being without sin) picked them up and aimed them at Mrs. Nevill Tyson. Sometimes they hit her, but more often they missed. They were clumsy. Then Miss Batchelor joined in; and, because she found that she was more skillful than the rest, she began, first to take a languid interest in the game, then to play as if her life depended on it. She aimed with mathe-

matical precision, picking out all the tiny difficult places that other people missed or grazed. Amongst them they had ended by burying Mrs. Nevill Tyson up to her neck in a fairly substantial pile of pebbles. It only needed one more stone to complete the work. Still, as I said before, Mrs. Nevill Tyson's enemies were not particularly anxious to throw it.

This was reserved for another hand.

It was impossible for Mrs. Wilcox to live, even obscurely, in Drayton Parva without hearing some garbled version of the current rumor. At first she was a little shocked at finding her son-in-law under a cloud. But if there is one truth more indisputable than another, it is that every cloud has a handsome silver lining to it. (Though, indeed, from Mrs. Wilcox's account of the matter, it was impossible to tell which was the lining and which was the cloud.) The more she thought of it the more she felt that there was nothing in it. There must be some misunderstanding somewhere. Her optimism,

rooted in ignorance, and watered with vanity, had become a sort of hardy perennial.

Then it came to Mrs. Wilcox's knowledge that certain reflections had been made on her daughter's conduct. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was said to be making good use of her liberty. No names had been mentioned in Mrs. Wilcox's hearing, but she knew perfectly well what had given rise to these ridiculous reports. It was the conspicuous attention which Sir Peter had insisted on paying Mrs. Nevill Tyson. Not that there was anything to be objected to in an old gentleman's frank admiration for a young (and remarkably pretty) married woman. No doubt Sir Peter had been very indiscreet in his expression of it. What with calling on her in private and paying her the most barefaced compliments in public, he had made her the talk of the county. Mrs. Wilcox went further: she was firmly convinced that Sir Peter had fallen a hopeless victim to her daughter's attractions, and she had derived a great deal of gratification from the flattering thought.

But now that Molly was being compromised by the old fellow's attentions, it was another matter.

That anybody else could have compromised her by his attentions did not once occur to Mrs. Wilcox. By its magnificent unlikelihood, the idea that Sir Peter Morley, M.P., was fascinated by her daughter extinguished every other. So possessed was Mrs. Wilcox by the idea of Sir Peter that she had never thought of Stanistreet. In any case Stanistreet was the last person she would have thought of. He came and went without her notice, a familiar, and therefore insignificant, fact of her daily life.

Of course Molly was a desperate little flirt; but it was absurd that her flirtations should be made responsible for "this temporary separation." (That was the mild phrase by which Mrs. Wilcox described Tyson's desertion of his wife.) As for her encouraging Sir Peter in her husband's absence, that was all nonsense. Mrs. Wilcox was a woman of the world, and she would have passed the

whole thing off with a laugh, but that, really, the reports were so scandalous. They actually declared that her daughter had been seen going about with Sir Peter in the most open and shameless manner, ever since she had been left to her own devices.

Well, Mrs. Wilcox could disprove *that* by the irrefragable logic of facts.

It was high time something should be done. Her plan was to go quietly and call on Miss Batchelor, and mention the facts in a casual way. She would not mention Sir Peter.

So with the idea of Sir Peter in her head and a letter from Molly in her pocket, Mrs. Wilcox called on Miss Batchelor. There was nothing extraordinary in that, for the ladies were in the habit of exchanging half-yearly visits, and Mrs. Wilcox was about due.

She stood a little bit in awe of a woman who took up all sorts of dreadful subjects as easily as you take up an acquaintance, and had such works as "The Principles of Psychology" lying about as the light literature of her drawing-room table. But Miss

Batchelor was much more nervous than her visitor, therefore Mrs. Wilcox had the advantage at once.

She knew perfectly well what she was going to do. She was not going to make a fuss; that would do more harm than good. She had simply to mention the facts in a casual way, without mentioning Sir Peter. As for the separation, that was not to be taken seriously for a moment.

She began carelessly. "I heard from Molly this morning."

"Indeed? Good news, I hope?"

"Very good news. Except that she's disappointed me. She's not coming to Thorneytoft after all."

"I didn't know she was expected."

"Well, I wanted her to run down and entertain *me* a little, now that she can get away."

"It would be rather a sacrifice for her to leave town just at the beginning of the season."

"That's it. She has such hosts of engage-

ments—always going out somewhere. She tells me she thinks nothing of five theatres in one week."

Miss Batchelor raised her eyebrows.

"She must be very much stronger than she was at Thorneytoft."

"She's never been so well in her life. Thorneytoft didn't agree with her at all. She's been a different woman since they left it." (This to guard against any suspicion of an attraction in the neighborhood.) "Nevill was never well there either."

"I never thought it would suit Mr. Tyson."

"No; it wasn't the life for him at all. He's got too much go in him to settle down anywhere in the country. Look how he's roamed about the world." (Now was her opportunity.) "You know, Miss Batchelor, there's a great deal of nonsense talked about this separation."

"There's a great deal of nonsense talked about most things in this place."

"Well—but really, if you think of it, what is there to talk about? He's just gone away

in a huff, and—and he'll come back in another. You'll see. He has a very peculiar temper, has Nevill; and Molly's too—too suscept—too emotional. People can't always hit it off together."

"No——"

"No. And I think it's a very good plan to separate for a time. For a time, of course. It's her own wish."

(Oh, Mrs. Wilcox! But strict accuracy is an abject virtue when pride and the honor of a family are at stake.)

"That's all very well, my dear Mrs. Wilcox, but in the meanwhile people will talk."

"*That* won't break Molly's heart. She'd snap her fingers at them. And the more they talk, the more she'll go her own way. That's Molly all over. You can't turn her by talking, but she'd go through fire and water for any one she loves."

Poor vulgar, silly Mrs. Wilcox! But try her on the subject of her daughter, and she rang true.

Miss Batchelor smiled. She didn't know about going through fire; but Mrs. Nevill had certainly been playing with the element, and got her fingers badly scorched too.

"Well," said she, "of course, so long as Mrs. Nevill Tyson doesn't break her heart over it."

"Does it look as if she were breaking her heart? Five theatres in one week."

"No; I can't say I think it does."

"Shockingly dissipated, isn't she?"

"Well—rather more dissipated than we are in Drayton Parva. You must miss her dreadfully, Mrs. Wilcox?"

"I don't mind that so long as she's happy. You see, it's not as if she hadn't friends. I know she's well looked after."

Mrs. Wilcox felt that she was making a remarkably good case of it. And she had not once mentioned Sir Peter.

All was well so long as you did not mention Sir Peter.

"I'm very glad to hear it."

"Of course *I* want her to get away out of

it all. I know that people are making very strange remarks about her staying——"

"They might make stranger remarks if she came, that's one consolation. Still——"

"Well, Miss Batchelor, the child is perfectly willing to come if I want her. But—er—er—a friend"—(Mrs. Wilcox was determined to be discreet, and leave no loophole for scandal)—"a friend has strongly advised her to stay."

"Oh, no doubt she is perfectly right. Sir Peter is in town again, I believe?"

Miss Batchelor said it abruptly, as if she were trying to change the subject. And at the mention of Sir Peter Mrs. Wilcox lost her head and fluttered into the trap. There are fallacies in the logic of facts.

"No, no," she said, getting up to go. "It was Captain Stanistreet I meant."

Again Miss Batchelor smiled.

This was proof positive—the last stone.

CHAPTER XIV

THE "CRITERION"

MRS. NEVILL'S account of herself, though somewhat highly colored, was substantially true. When Stanistreet suggested defeat, it was his first allusion to her husband's desertion of her; and like most of Louis's utterances, it was full of tact.

Defeat? She had brooded over the idea, and then apparently she had an inspiration.

From that day, wherever there was a sufficiently important crowd to see her, Mrs. Nevill Tyson was to be seen. She was generally with Louis Stanistreet, who was not a figure to be overlooked; she was always exquisitely dressed; and sometimes, not often, she was delicately painted and powdered. Mrs. Nevill Tyson hated what was commonplace and loud; and she had to make herself conspicuous in a season when women dressed

fortissimo, and a fashionable crowd was like a bed of flowers in June. Somehow she managed to strike some resonant minor chord of color that went throbbing through that confused orchestra. Everywhere she went people turned and stared at her as she flashed by; and apparently her one object was to be stared at. She became as much of a celebrity as any woman with a character and without a position "in society" can become. If she were counterfeiting a type, enough of the original Mrs. Nevill Tyson remained to give her own supernatural *naïveté* to the character. Stanistreet was completely puzzled by this new freak; it looked like recklessness, it looked like vanity, it looked—it looked like an innocent parody of guilt. He had given in to her whim, as he had given in to every wish of hers, but he was not quite sure that he liked the frankness, the publicity of the thing. He wondered how so small a woman contrived to attract so large a share of attention in a city where pretty women were as common as paving-stones. Perhaps

it was partly owing to the persistence and punctuality of her movements: she patronized certain theatres, haunted certain thoroughfares at certain times. She had an affection for Piccadilly, a sentiment for Oxford Circus, and a passion for the Strand. Louis could sympathize with these preferences; he, too, liked to walk up and down the Embankment in the summer twilight—though why such abrupt stoppages? Why such impetuous speed? He could understand a human being finding a remote interest in the Houses of Parliament, but he could not understand why Mrs. Nevill Tyson should love to linger outside the doors of the War Office.

Her ways were indeed inscrutable; but he had learnt to know them all, not a gesture escaped him. How well he knew the turn of her head and the sudden flash of her face as they entered a theatre, and her eyes swept the house, eager, expectant, dubious; how well he knew the excited touch on his sleeve, the breath half-drawn, the look that was a confidence and an enigma; knew, too, the

despondent droop of her eyes when the play was done and it was all over; the tightening of her hand upon his arm, and the shrinking of the whole tiny figure as they made their way out through the crowd. She had spirit enough for anything; but her nerves were all on edge—she was so easily tired, so easily startled.

Day after day, and night after night; it was evident that at this rate she and Tyson were bound to see each other some time, somewhere. Stanistreet wondered whether that thought had ever occurred to her. And if they met—well, he could not tell whether he desired or feared to see that meeting. In all probability it would put an end to doubt. Was it possible that he had begun to love doubt for its own sake?

At last they met, as was to be expected, and Stanistreet was there to see. He had taken her to the "Criterion" one night, and at the close of the first act Tyson came into the box opposite theirs. He was alone. The lights went up in the house, and he looked

round before he sat down; evidently he had recognized his wife, and evidently she knew it. Stanistreet, watching her with painful interest, saw her body slacken and her face turn white under its paint and powder.

"Either she cares for the beggar still, or else—she's afraid for her life of him."

A horrible thought flashed across him. What if all the time she had simply been making use of him as—as a damned stalking-horse for Tyson? It might account for the enigmatic smiles, the swift transitions, the whole maddening mystery of her ways. If he had been nothing to her but the man who knew more about Tyson than anybody else? She had always had a way of making him talk about Tyson, while he seemed to himself to be most engagingly egotistic.

And he had once thought that Mrs. Nevill Tyson adored her husband for his (Stanistreet's) benefit. There was this summer, and that moment in the library at Thorneytoft——

Mrs. Nevill Tyson was beyond him. And he had been three years trying to understand her. He was a man of the world, and he ought to have understood.

Ah—perhaps that was the reason of his failure!

He looked at her again. She had shifted her position, turned her back on the stage; her eyes were lowered, fixed on the programme in her lap, but they were motionless; she was not reading. One ungloved arm hung by her side, and under the white skin he could see the pulses leaping and throbbing in the arteries, the delicate tissues of her bodice trembled and shook. Was it possible that in that frivolous little body, under that corsage of lace and satin and whalebone, there beat one of those rare and tragic passions, all-consuming, all-absorbing, blind and deaf to everything but itself? In that case—well, he felt something very like awe before what he called her miraculous stupidity. But no, it was impossible; to believe it was to believe in miracles, and he had

long ago lost his faith in the supernatural. Women did not love like that nowadays.

Tyson left the box before the close of the last act. She kept her place for ten minutes after the fall of the curtain, while the crowd streamed out. She stood long after the house was empty, saying nothing, but waiting—waiting. Once she looked piteously at Stani-street. Her fingers trembled so that she could not fasten her cloak, her gloves. He helped her. A weird little ghost of a smile fluttered to her lips and vanished.

They hurried out at last along empty passages. Tyson was nowhere to be seen. They drove quickly home.

At the corner of Francis Street the hansom drew up with a jerk and waited. A crowd blocked the way. She leaned forward with a little cry. What was it? An accident? No; a fight. The great swinging lamps over the door of a public-house threw their yellow light on a ring of brutal faces, men and women, for the most part drunk, trampling, hustling, shouldering each other in their haste

to break through to the center. A girl reeled from the public-house and stood on the edge of the pavement bawling a vile song. A man lurched up against the side of the hansom; a coarse swollen face flaming with drink was pressed to the glass, close to her own. As she shrank back in horror, turning her head away from the evil thing, her face sought Stanistreet, the soft fringe of her hair brushed against his cheek. She had never been so near to him, never, in the abstraction of her terror, so far away. To-night everything combined to make his own meaning clear to him, sharpened his fierce indignant longing to take her away, out of the hell where these things were possible, to protect her forever from the brutalities of life.

There was a stir; the crowd swayed forward and began to move. They followed slowly in its wake, hemmed in by the rabble that streamed towards Ridgmount Gardens, to lose itself in the black slums of Bloomsbury. On the pavement the reeling girl was swept on with the crowd, still singing her

hideous song. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was leaning back now, with her eyes closed, not heeding the ugly pageant. But the scene came back to her in nightmares afterwards.

As Stanistreet's hansom turned after leaving her at Ridgmount Gardens, he thought he saw some one remarkably like Tyson standing in the shadow of the railings opposite her door. He must have seen them; and but for the delay they would probably have overtaken and so missed him.

And Stanistreet kept on saying to himself: No. Women do not love like that. And yet the bare idea of it turned Stanistreet, the cool, the collected, into a trembling maniac. He could not face the possibility of losing her, of being nothing to her. But for that he might have been content to go on drifting indefinitely, sure of a sort of visionary eternity, taking no count of time. He had been happy in his doubt. Once it had tormented him; he had struggled against it; later, it had become a source of endless interest, like a man's amusing dialogues with his own soul;

now, it was the one solitary refuge of his hope. He clung to it, he could not let it go. He staked his all on the folly, the frailty of Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

He had yet to prove it.

Of course she was a little fool; that went without saying. He had known many women who were fools, and he had survived their folly. But it seemed that he could not live without this particular little fool.

He called the next day at Ridgmount Gardens.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson's manner was a little disconcerting. He found her at the piano, singing in her pathetic mezzo-soprano a song that used to be a favorite of Tyson's. The selection was another freak; it was the first time Louis had heard her sing that song since they left Thorneytoft.

This is what she sang; but Louis only came in for the last two verses.

"Oh feet that would be roving,
I will not bid you stay,
Though my heart should break with loving,
When love is far away.

(*Dim.*) Oh heart that would be sleeping,
I will not wake you. No,
You shall hear no sound of weeping,
No footsteps come and go.

Then come not for my calling,
Roam on the livelong day;
Some time when night is falling,
Love will steal home and stay.

Or sleep, and fe-ear no waking,
Sleep on, the li-ights are low,
Some time when dawn is breaking,
Love will awa-ake—awa-ake,
(*Cresc.*) Love will awa-ake and know."

That was the sort of song Tyson liked; and well, as Mrs. Nevill sang it, Stanistreet liked it too. And Stanistreet was not in the least musical.

"What—*you* here again?" said she, swinging round on her music-stool. "That's a jolly crescendo, isn't it? But they're the silliest words, don't you think? As if love ever came home to stay if he could help it. He might put up a few things in a portmanteau, and run down from Saturday to Monday, perhaps, and—the lady was very accommodating, wasn't she?"

Stanistreet frowned and champed the ends of his mustache. This was not at all the mood he desired to find her in.

"Don't be cynical," said he; "it's not like you."

"Dear me—what shall I be then? What *is* like me?" She threw herself back in a chair, kicked out her little feet, and yawned. It reminded Louis unpleasantly of the attitude of the woman in the *Marriage à la Mode.* Then she chattered; and it struck him, as it had struck him more than once before, that Tyson had found his wife's head empty and furnished it according to his own taste. She was always quoting Tyson; and as there was not the least indication of inverted commas, it was hard to tell which was quotation and which was the original text. This creature of fitful, unbalanced mind and reckless speech was certainly the Mrs. Nevill Tyson he had sometimes seen at Thorneytoft; but it was not the Mrs. Nevill Tyson of last night, nor even of the other day, that afternoon when her eyes said, as unmistakably as eyes could

say anything, that she would not accept defeat.

Another moment and the expression of her face had changed again; he saw something there that he had never seen before, something unguarded and appealing. He was near the end of doubt.

He felt that if he stayed with her another moment he would lose his head, and he did not want to lose it—yet! He struggled desperately between his desire to stay and his will to go—if there was any difference between desire and will.

His struggles were cut short by the entrance of Tyson.

He walked into the room at half-past five, greeted Stanistreet cheerfully (his eyes twinkling), ordered fresh tea, and began to talk to his wife as if nothing had happened. If Louis had not known him so well, he would have said he was immensely improved since the remarkable occasion on which they had last met. He had quarreled with his best friend; he had betrayed his wife and then

left her; and he could come back with a twinkle in his eye.

From where Stanistreet sat Mrs. Nevill Tyson's face was a *profil perdu;* but he could hear her breath fluttering in her throat like a bird.

"Didn't I see you two at the 'Criterion' last night?" said Tyson. "What did you think of 'Rosemary,' Molly?"

"I—I thought it was very good."

"From a purely literary point of view, eh? As you sat with your back to the stage your judgment was not biased by such vulgar accessories as scenery and acting. No doubt that is the way to enjoy a play. What are your engagements for to-night?"

"Mine? I have none, Nevill."

"Ah—well, then, you might tell them to get my room ready for me. Don't go, Stanistreet."

He had come home to stay.

CHAPTER XV

CONFLAGRATION

To see his wife casually in a crowd, and to fall desperately in love with her for the second time, was a unique experience even in Tyson's life. But it had its danger. He had never been jealous before; now a feeling very like jealousy had been roused by seeing her with Stanistreet. He had followed her to the "Criterion"; he had hurried out before the end of the piece, and hung about Ridgmount Gardens till he had seen her home-coming. Stanistreet's immediate departure was a relief to a certain anxiety that he was base enough to feel. And still there remained a vague suspicion and discomfort. He had to begin all over again with her. In their first courtship she was a child; in their second she was a woman. Hitherto, the creature of a day, she had seemed to spring into life

afresh every morning, without a memory of yesterday or a thought of to-morrow; she had had no past, not even an innocent one. And now he had no notion what experiences she might not have accumulated during this year in which he had left her. That was her past; and they had the future before them.

They had been alone together for three days, three days and three nights of happiness; and on the evening of the fourth day Tyson had found her reading—yes, actually reading!

He sat down opposite her to watch the curious sight.

Perhaps she had said to herself: "Some day I shall be old, and very likely I shall be ugly. If I am stupid too, he will be bored, and perhaps he will leave me. So now—I am going to be his intellectual companion."

He was amused, just as Stanistreet had been. "I say, I can't have that, you know. What have you got there?"

She held up her book without speaking. "Othello," of all things in the world!

"Shakespeare? I thought so. When a woman's in a damned bad temper she always reads Shakespeare, or Locke on the Human Understanding. Come out of that."

Though Mrs. Nevill Tyson set her little teeth very hard, the corners of her mouth and eyes curled with mischief. It was delicious to feel that she could torment Nevill, to know that she had so much power. And while she pretended to read she played with the pearl necklace she wore. It was one shade with the white of her beautiful throat.

"Who gave you those pearls?"

She made no answer, but her hand dropped a little consciously. He had given them to her that afternoon, remarking, with rather questionable taste, that they were "a wedding-present for the second Mrs. Nevill Tyson."

He leant over her chair and assailed her with questions to which no answer came, to which no answer was possible, punctuating his periods with kisses.

"Are you a conundrum? Or a fiend? Or

a metaphysical system? And if so, why do you wear a pink frock? Are you a young woman who prefers a dead poet to a living husband? Are you a young woman at all? Or only a dear little, sweet little, pink little strawberry iceberg?"

He lay down on the sofa as if overcome by unutterable fatigue. "Just as you like," he murmured faintly. "You'll be sorry for this some day. Shakespeare is immortal. I, most unfortunately, am not."

He got up and threw the window open. He ramped about the room, soliloquizing as he went. Never, even in the last days of their engagement, had she seen him so restless. (But she was not going to speak yet; not she!) He stopped before the chimney-piece; it was covered with ridiculous objects, the things that please a child: there were Swiss cow-bells and stags carved in wood, Chinese idols that wagged their heads, little images of performing cats, teacups, a whole shelf full of toys. Not one of them but had some minute fragment of his wife's personality

adhering to it. He remembered the insane impulse that came upon him last year to smash them, sweep the lot of them on to the floor. To-night he could have kissed them, cried over them. "T-t-t-tt! What affecting absurdity!" That was the way he went on. And now he sat down by her writing-table, and was taking things up and examining them while he talked. He never, never forgot the expression of a certain brass porcupine that was somehow a penwiper; it seemed to belong to a world gone mad, where everything was something else, where porcupines *were* penwipers, and his wife——

For suddenly his tongue had stopped. He had caught sight of an enormous bunch of hothouse flowers in a vase on the floor by the writing-table. Stanistreet's card was in the midst of the bunch, and a note from Stanistreet lay open on the writing-table.

There was an ominous pause while Tyson read it. It was curt enough; only an offer of flowers and a ticket for the "Lyceum." Stanistreet's mind must have been seriously

off its balance, otherwise he would never have done this clumsy thing.

Tyson strode to his wife's chair and tossed the letter into her lap.

"How long has Stanistreet been paying you these little attentions?"

She looked up smiling. I am not sure that she did not think this new tone of Tyson's was part of the game they were playing together. She had never taken him seriously.

"Ever since he found out that I liked them, I suppose."

"Did it not occur to you that the things you like are rather expensive luxuries, some of them?"

"No. Perhaps that's why I hardly ever get them."

"My dear girl, I know the precise amount of Stanistreet's income. Money can't be any object to him. But perhaps you've a soul above boxes at the 'Criterion,' and champagne suppers afterwards, and the rest of it?"

"I have, unfortunately. But there wasn't

any champagne." Her indifferent voice gave the lie to her beating pulses. Between playing and fighting there is only a difference of degree.

"Will you kindly tell me why you selected Stanistreet of all people for this business?"

"I didn't select him—he was always there."

"And if it hadn't been Stanistreet it would have been somebody else? I see. I hope you appreciate the peculiar advantages of his society?"

"I do. Louis is a gentleman, though he *is* your friend. He knows how to talk to women."

"If he doesn't it is not for want of practice. I could swallow all this, Molly, if you were a little girl just out of the schoolroom; but—I don't think you've much to learn."

Mrs. Nevill Tyson's eyes flashed. The play had turned to deadly earnest. "Not much, thanks to you," said she. Her voice sank. "Louis was good to me."

"Was he? *'Good'* to you—How extremely touching! Pray, were you good to him?"

"No—no." She shook her head remorsefully. "I wish I had been."

Tyson knitted his brows and looked at her. He had not quite made up his mind.

"Do you know, I don't altogether believe in your refreshing *naïveté.* Stanistreet is not 'good' to pretty women for nothing. I know, and you know, that a woman who has been seen with him as you apparently have been, is not supposed to have a character to lose."

She rose to her feet and faced him. "How could you? Oh, how could you?"

He shrank from her, without the least attempt to conceal his repulsion. "If you look in the glass you'll see."

She turned mechanically and saw the reflection of her face, all flushed as it was and distorted, the eyes fierce with passion. It was like the sudden leaping forth of her soul; and Mrs. Nevill Tyson's soul, after three days' intercourse with her husband's, was not a

thing to trust implicitly. Without sinning it seemed unconsciously to reflect his sin. I can not tell you how that was; marriage is a great mystery.

She understood him, though imperfectly; she understood many things now. Oh, he was right—she looked the part; no wonder that he hated her. She sat down and covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out that momentary vision of herself. Herself and not herself. What she saw was something that had never been. But it was something that might be—herself, as Tyson alone had power to make her. All this came to her as an unexplained, confused terror, a trouble of the nerves; there was no reasoning, no idea; it was all too new.

But if she did not understand her own misery, she understood vaguely what he had said to her. She got up and went to her writing-table where a letter lay folded, ready for its envelope. She gave it to him without a word.

"Do you mean me to read this?" he asked.

"Yes; if you like." She answered without looking at him; apparently she was absorbed in addressing her envelope.

He opened the letter gingerly, and read in his wife's schoolgirl handwriting:—

"Dear Louis,—It's awfully good of you but I'm afraid I can't go with you to the 'Lyceum' to-morrow night so I return the ticket with many thanks, in case you want to give it to somebody else. Nevill has come home—why of course you saw him—and I am so happy and I want all my time for him.

"I thought you'd like to know this. I'm sure he will be delighted to see you whenever you like to call.—Yours sincerely,

"Molly Tyson.

"*P. S.*—Thanks awfully for the lovely flowers. You can smell them all over the flat!"

"Come here, you fool," he said gently.

But Mrs. Nevill Tyson was stamping her envelope with great deliberation and care.

She handed it to him at arm's length and darted away. He heard her turning the key in her bedroom door with a determined click.

He read her letter over again twice. The ridiculous little phrases convinced him of the groundlessness of his suspicion. Punctuation would have argued premeditation, and premeditation guilt. "Nevill has come home—why of course you saw him." She had actually forgotten that Stanistreet had been there on the evening of his arrival.

He laughed so loud that Mrs. Nevill Tyson heard him in her bedroom.

An hour later he heard her softly unlocking her door. He smiled. She might be as innocent as she pleased, but she had made him make a cursed fool of himself, and he meant that she should suffer for that.

He threw Stanistreet's flowers out of the window, put Molly's note up in its envelope and sent it to the post. Then he sat down to think.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson's room was opposite the one she had just left. She stood for a moment

before her looking-glass, studying her own reflection. She took off her pearl necklace and spanned her white throat with her tiny hands. And as she looked she was glad. When all was said and done she looked beautiful —beautiful after her small fashion. She turned this way and that to make perfectly sure of the fact. She had realized long ago how much her hold on Nevill's affections depended on it. His love had waxed and waned with her beauty. Well— She opened her door before getting into bed, and for the next hour she lay listening and wondering. She saw the line of light at the top of the drawing-room door disappear as the big lamp went out. It was followed by a fainter streak. Nevill must have lit the little lamp on the table by the window. (Oh, dear! He was going to sit up, then.) She heard him go into the dining-room beyond and stumble against things; then came the spurt of a match, followed by the clinking of glasses. (He was only going to have a smoke and a drink,) She waited a little while longer, then she

called to him. There was no answer; he must be dozing on the couch in the dining-room. A light wind lifted the carpet at the door, and she wondered drowsily whether Nevill had left the drawing-room window open.

He had done all that she supposed, and more. First of all, he drank a little more than was good for him; this happened occasionally now. Then he sat down and wrote what he thought was a very terse and biting letter to Stanistreet, in which he said: "You needn't call. You will not find either of us at home at Ridgmount Gardens from May to August, nor at Thorneytoft from August to May. And if you should happen to meet my wife anywhere in public, you will oblige me greatly by cutting her."

This letter he left on the table outside for postage in the morning. Then he went back to the dining-room and drank a great deal more than was good for him. Of course he left the drawing-room window open and the lamp burning, and by midnight he was sleeping heavily in the adjoining room. And the

wind got up in the night: it played with the muslin curtains, flinging them out like streamers into the room; played with the flimsy parasol lamp-shade until it tilted, and the little lamp was thrown on to the floor.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson woke with the light crash. She sat up for a moment, then got out of bed, crossed the passage, and opened the drawing-room door. A warm wind puffed in her face; the air was full of black flakes flying through a red rain; a stream of fire ran along the floor, crests of flames leapt and quivered over the steady blue under-current; and over there, in the corner, an absurd little arm-chair had caught fire all by itself; the flames had peeled off its satin covering like a skin, and were slowly consuming the horse-hair stuffing; the pitiable object sent out great puffs and clouds of smoke that writhed in agonized spirals. The tiny room had become a battlefield of dissolute forces. But as yet none of the solid furniture was touched; it was a superficial conflagration.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson saw nothing but the

stream of fire that ran between her and the room where Nevill lay. She picked up her skirt and waded through it barefoot. A spark flung from the burning draperies settled on the wide flapping frills of her night-gown. Nevill was fast asleep with the rug over him and his mouth open. She shook him with one hand, and with the other she tried to beat down her flaming capes. Was he never going to wake?

She was afraid to move; but by dropping forward on her knees she could just reach some soda-water on the table; she dashed it over his face. The fire had hurt the soles of her feet; now it had caught her breast, her throat, her hair; it rose flaming round her head, and she cried aloud in her terror. Still clutching Nevill's sleeve, she staggered and fell across him, and he woke.

He woke dazed; but he had sense enough to roll her in the rug and crush the flames out.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEW LIFE

"THERE is now every hope," so wrote that cheerful lady, Mrs. Wilcox, "of dear Molly's complete recovery."

This, translated from the language of optimism, meant that dear Molly's beauty was dead, but that Molly would live.

To live, indeed, was not what she had wanted. Mrs. Nevill Tyson had made up her mind to die; and in the certain hope of death she had borne the dressing of her burns without a murmur. Lying there, swathed in her bandages, life came back slowly and unwillingly to her aching nerves and thirsting veins; and the sense of life woke with a sting, as if her brain were bound tight, tight, and the pulse of thought beat thickly under the intolerable ligatures. Then, when they told her she would live, she screamed and made

as though she would tear the bandages from her head and throat.

"Take them off," she cried, "I won't have them. You said I was going to die, and I want to die—I want to die—I tell you. Don't let Nevill come near me. He'll want to come and look at me when I'm dead. Don't let him come!"

But Nevill was there. The first thing he did, when he heard the doctor's verdict, was to go straight into his wife's room and cry. He bent over her bed, sobbing hysterically—"Molly—Molly—my little wife!"

That made her suddenly quiet.

She turned towards him, and her eyes looked bigger and darker than ever in the section of her face that was not covered with bandages. She held out her hand, the right hand that had clung with such a grip to his coat-sleeve and was thus left unhurt. He stroked it and kissed it many times over, he said what a pretty hand it was; and then, when he remembered the things he had said and thought of her, he cried again.

"This excitement is very bad for her. Shall I tell him to go away?" whispered Mrs. Wilcox to the nurse. The nurse shook her head.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson had heard; she gave a queer little fluttering laugh that was meant to be derisive and ended like a sob. "If *you* went away, both of you," said she, "I might feel better."

They went away and left them.

From that moment Mrs. Nevill Tyson was no longer bent upon dying. She had conceived an immense hope—that old, old hope of the New Life. They would begin all over again and from the very beginning. Life is an endless beginning. Had not Nevill's tears assured her that he loved her still, in spite of what had been done to her? It takes so much to make a man cry.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson may have understood men; it is not so clear that she knew all about sentimentalists. It seemed as though her beauty being dead, all that was blind and selfish in her passion for Nevill had died with

it. She was glad to be delivered from the torment of the senses, to feel that the immortal human soul of her love was free. And as she was very young and had the heart of a little child, she firmly believed that her husband's emotions had undergone the same purifying regenerating process.

As for Tyson, he had not a doubt on the subject. One morning he was sitting in her room, watching her with a feverish, intermittent devotion. He noticed her right arm as it hung along the counterpane, and the droop of the beautiful right hand—the one beautiful thing about her now. He remembered how he used to tease her about that little white spot on her wrist, and how she used to laugh and shake down her ruffles or her bangles to hide it. Even now she had the old trick; she had drawn the sleeve of her night-gown over it, as she felt his gaze resting on it. Strange—though she was still sensitive about that tiny blemish, she was apparently indifferent to the change in her face. He wondered if she realized how irreparably her beauty was de-

stroyed, and as he wondered he looked away, lest his eyes should wake that consciousness in her. He had no idea how long they had been alone together. Time was not measured by words, for neither had spoken much. He had taken Henley's "Verses" at haphazard from the bookshelf and was turning over the pages, dipping here and there, in the fastidious fashion of a man in no mind for any ideas but his own. Presently he broke out in a voice that throbbed thickly with emotion—

> "Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul——"

He had found the music that matched his mood. He chanted—

> "It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate;
> I am the captain of my soul."

Some clumsy movement of his foot shook the bed and jarred her. She drew in her breath sharply.

"God forgive me!" he cried, "did I hurt you, darling?"

"I don't mind. It's worth it," said she,

At her look his sins rose up to his remembrance. He flung himself on his knees beside the bed, shaken with his passion of remorse. He muttered a wild, inarticulate confession.

"Don't, Nevill, don't," she whispered; "it made no difference. It's all over and done with now."

He looked at her body and thought of the beauty of her soul. He broke into vows and promises.

"Yes; it's all over. I swear I'll never look at another woman as long as I live."

The pressure of her weak arms round his neck thrilled him with an exquisite tenderness, a voluptuous pity. Surely, surely in his heart of hearts he had never loved any woman as he loved her. She comforted him; she whispered things too sacred for perfect utterance. It struck him from time to time that she had no clear notion of the nature of the wrongs she forgave, just as by some

miracle her mind had dwelt apart from everything that was base in her own marriage. Her ideas of evil were vague and bodiless. She may have conceived Nevill to have been the victim of some malign intellectual influence, the thrall, perhaps, of some Miss Batchelor *sans merci*. There may have been mysteries, gulfs before which she shuddered, dim regions which she could only just divine. He did not know that with women like his wife there is all infinity between what they realize and what they fear. Yet within its range of vision her love was terribly clear-sighted. And now, one by one, Tyson's sins fell from him in the purifying fire of his wife's fancy.

He staggered to his feet and looked round him with glazed eyes; he was drunk with his own emotions. She followed his gaze; it was caught by some object above her bed.

"Hallo," said he, "what's my old sword doing there? My beauty!"

"I brought it in," said she.

"What did you do that for, eh?"

"I don't know. I think I thought that some day you'd walk off with it somewhere, and that if you did that, you'd never come back again. So you see I liked to know it was hanging safe up there when I was asleep. You don't mind, do you?"

He muttered something about "rust" and "an outside wall."

"It's all right. I've cleaned it myself. I used to take it down and look at it every day."

"When did you do that, Molly?"

"All the time you were away."

"Good God!" He took the sword down from the nail where it hung by a red cord.

"You won't find a speck of dust on it anywhere," said she.

He had drawn the sword from its scabbard and laid it across his knee. He felt its edge; he drew his finger down the long groove that ran along the center of the blade; his gaze rested almost passionately on the floral arabesque that fringed that bed of the river of blood. Not a spot of rust from hilt to

point; the scabbard, too, was bright and clean.

He held up the sword, still looking at it with the eyes of a lover; a quick turn of his wrist, and it leapt and flashed in the sun.

He turned to his wife, smiling. "Isn't she a beauty?" said he.

Fear gripped her heart. She may have had shadowy notions of Tyson's conjugal infidelities, but she had a very clear idea of the power of her rival, the sword. She did not know that he was merely moved by the spirit of Henley's verse.

"Take it away," she said; "I don't like the look of it."

"Well, it's not a nice thing to have hanging over your head."

He took it away and hung it in its old place in the dining-room.

And Mrs. Nevill Tyson was content. Though there was not a sign or a hope that her beauty would be restored to her, she was content. What was more, she was positively

glad that it was gone, regarding the loss of it as the ransom for Tyson's soul.

She was growing stronger every day now, and they were full of plans for their future. No attempt had been made to repair the damage done by the fire. It was settled—so far as anything was settled—that they were to let the flat, let Thorneytoft too, and go away from London, from England perhaps, to some Elysium to be agreed on by them both. It was to be a second honeymoon—or was it a third? There was nothing like beginning all over again from the very beginning. They talked of the Riviera.

In three weeks' time from the date of the fire she was well enough to be moved into the dining-room. Nevill carried her. They had to go through the empty drawing-room, and as they passed they stopped and looked round the desolate place. It struck them both that this was the scene of that terrible last act of the drama of the old life.

"When we've once gone we will never, never come back again," she said.

"No. We burnt our ships in that blaze, Moll. Do you mind very much?"

"No. I shall never want to see it again. In our new house we won't have anything to remind us of this."

"No, we'll have everything brand new, won't we?"

"Yes, brand new." She looked round her and smiled. "But it seems a little sad, don't you think? It *was* a pretty room, and there were all my things."

"Never mind. Plenty more where they came from."

They paused in the doorway.

"Ha! This is the way," said he, "that a bride used to be brought into her husband's house. They lifted her up so!" As he spoke he raised her high in his strong arms. He was smiling, glorying in his strength.

And that was the way Mrs. Nevill Tyson was carried over the threshold of the New Life. Or was it not rather her spirit that had lifted his? He too, unworthy, soiled and shamed with sin, had been suffered to go

with her a little way. For one luminous perfect moment he stood face to face with her in the mystic marriage-chamber of the soul; he heard—if it were only for a moment—the unspeakable epithalamium; he saw incomprehensible things.

It had needed some violent appeal to the senses, the spectacle or idea of physical agony, to rouse him to that first passion of pity and tenderness. Something like this he had felt once before, in the night watch at Thorneytoft, when the wife he had wronged lay in the clutches of life and death. But now, for the first time in his married life, he loved her. Surely this was the way of peace.

Surely, surely. She lay down in her gladness and prayed the prayer of her wedding-night: that God would make her a good wife. She did not pray that Nevill might be made a good husband; of *his* sins she had never spoken, not even to her God.

As for Mr. Nevill Tyson, in the joy of his heart he thanked whatever gods there might happen to be for his unconquerable soul.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CAPTAIN OF HIS SOUL

THREE weeks and they were still in London. If they could only have risen up in the morning of the New Life, and turned their backs on that hateful flat forever! But, seeing that Mrs. Nevill Tyson was tired out with her journey from one room to the other, it looked as if the greater removal was hardly to be thought of yet. The doctor was consulted.

"I must examine the heart," said the man of science.

He examined the heart.

"Better wait another week," he said, shortly. Brevity is the soul of medical wit; he was a very eminent man, and time also was short.

So they waited a week, three weeks in fact. The delay gave Tyson time to study the New Life in all its bearings. At first it seemed

to him that he too had attained. He was ready to fall in with all his wife's innocent schemes. For his own part he looked forward to the coming change with excitement that was pleasure in itself. He was perfectly prepared for an open rupture with the past, or, indeed, for any sudden and violent course of action, the more violent the better. He dreamed of cataclysms and upheavals, of trunks packed hastily in the night, of flight by express trains from London, the place of all disaster. His soul would have been appeased by a telegram.

Instead of telegrams he received doctors' bulletins, contradictory, ambiguous, elusive. They began to get on his nerves.

Still, there could be no possible doubt that he had attained. At any rate he had advanced a considerable distance on the way of peace. It looked like it; he was happy without anything to make him happy, a state which seemed to be a feature of the New Life.

The New Life was not exhausting. He had an idea that he could keep it up indefinitely. But at the end of the first fortnight

he realized that he was drifting, not towards peace, but towards a horrible, teeming, stagnant calm. Before long he would be given over to dullness and immitigable ennui.

A perfectly sane man would have faced the facts frankly. He would have pulled himself together, taken himself out of the house, and got something to do. And under any other circumstances, this is what Tyson would have done. Unfortunately, he considered it his duty as a repentant husband to stay at home; and at home he stayed, cultivating his emotions. Ah, those emotions! If Tyson had been simply and passionately vicious there might have been some chance for him. But sentimentalism, subtlest source of moral corruption, worked in him like that hectic disease that flames in the colors of life, flouting its wretched victim with an extravagant hope. The deadly taint was spreading, stirred into frightful activity by the shock of his wife's illness. He stayed indoors, lounging in easy-chairs, and lying about on sofas; he smoked, drank, yawned; he hovered in passages,

loomed in doorways; he hung about his wife's bedroom, chattering aimlessly, or sat in silence and deep depression by her side. In vain she implored him to go out, for goodness' sake, and get some fresh air. Once or twice, to satisfy her, he went, and yawned through a miserable evening at some theatre, when, as often as not, he left before the end of the first act. Hereditary conscience rose up and thrust him violently from the house; outside, the spirit of the Baptist minister, of the guileless cultivator of orchids, haled him by the collar and dragged him home. Or he would spend whole afternoons looking into shop windows in a dreamy quest of flowers, toys, trinkets, something that would "suit my wife." Judging from the unconsidered trifles that he brought home, he must have credited the poor little soul with criminally extravagant tastes. The tables and shelves about her couch were heaped with idiotic lumber, on which Mrs. Nevill Tyson looked with thoughtful eyes.

She was perpetually thinking now; she lay

there weaving long chains of reasoning from the flowers of her innocent fancy, chains so brittle and insubstantial, they would have offered no support to any creature less light than she. If Tyson was more than usually sulky, that was the serious side of him coming out; if he was silent, well, everybody knows that the deepest feelings are seldom expressed in words; if he was atrociously irritable, it was no wonder, considering the strain he had undergone, poor fellow. She reminded herself how he had cried over her like a child; she rehearsed that other scene of confession and forgiveness—the tender, sacred words, the promises and vows. Already the New Life was passing into the life of memory, while she told herself that it could not pass. It takes so much to make a strong man cry, you know. When doubts came, she always fell back on the argument from tears.

He was reading to her one evening after she had gone tired to bed (reading was so much easier than talking), when Mrs. Nevill

Tyson, whose attention wandered dreadfully, interrupted him.

"Nevill—you remember that night when the accident happened? I mean—just before the fire?"

He moaned out an incoherent assent.

"And you remember what you thought?"

His only answer was a nervous movement of his feet.

"Well, I've often wanted to tell you about that. I know you didn't really think there was anything between me and Louis, but—"

"Of course I didn't."

"I know—really. Still it might have made a difference. I would have told you all about it that night, if it hadn't been for that beastly fire. You know mother said I was awfully silly—I laid myself open to all sorts of dreadful things. She said I ought to have left London—that time. I couldn't. I knew when you came back you would come right here—I might have missed you. Besides, it would have been horrible to go back to Thorneytoft,

where everybody was talking and thinking things. They *would* talk, Nevill."

"The fiends! You shouldn't have minded them, darling. They didn't understand you. How could they? The brutes."

"Me? Oh, I wouldn't have minded *that.*"

Tyson was frankly astonished. Apparently she had not a notion that she had been the subject of any scurrilous reports at Drayton Parva or elsewhere. From the first she had resented their social ostracism (when she became aware of it) as an insult to him; and now, evidently she had found the clue to the mysterious scandal in her knowledge of his conduct. Before she could do that, in her own mind she must have accused him gravely. And yet, but for this characteristic little inadvertence, he would never have known it. How much did she know?

She went on a little incoherently; so many ideas cropped up to be gathered instantly, and wreathed into the sequence of her thought. "Mother said people would talk if I didn't take care. She thought Sir Peter—poor old

Sir Peter—do you remember his funny red face, and his throat—all turkey's wattles?—because he said I was the prettiest woman in Leicestershire. I don't see much harm in that, you know. Anyhow, he can't very well do it again—now. *Perhaps*—she thought I oughtn't to have gone about quite so much with Louis."

"Why did you, Molly? It was a mistake."

"I wonder—— Well, it was all my fault."

"No; it was Stanistreet's. He knew what he was about."

"It was *mine*. I liked him."

"What did you see to like in him?" (He really had some curiosity on that point.)

"I liked him because he was your friend—the best friend you ever had. I hated the other men that used to come. And when you were away I felt somehow as if—as if—he was all that was left of you. But that was afterwards. I think I liked him first of all because he liked you."

"How do you know it was me he liked?"

"Oh, it was; I *know*. Whatever other

people thought, he always understood. Do you see? We used to talk about you, every day I think, till just the last—and then, he knew what I was thinking. Then he was sorry when baby died. I can never forget that."

(Inconceivable! Had she never for an instant understood? Ah, well, if *he* had been so transfigured in her sight, she might well idealize Stanistreet.)

She went on impetuously, with inextricable confusion of persons and events. "Nevill—I wasn't kind to him. They said I didn't care —and I did—I did! It nearly broke my heart. Only I was afraid you'd think I loved him better than you, and so—I didn't take any notice of him. I thought he wouldn't mind—he was so little, you see; and then I thought some day I could tell him. Oh, Nevill—*do* you think he minded?"

He bowed his head. He had not a word to say. He was trying to realize this thing. To keep his worthless love, she had given up everything, even to the supreme sacrifice of her motherhood.

Her fingers clutched the counterpane, working feverishly. She had had something else to say. But she was afraid to say it, to speak of that unspeakable new thing, her hidden hope of motherhood. He covered her hands with his to keep them still.

"You see it was all right, as it happened."

"Yes—as it happened. But I think it was a little hard on poor old Stanistreet."

"Sometimes I wonder if it *was* fair. He used to say things; but I didn't take them in at the time. I didn't understand; and somehow now, I feel as if it had never happened. Perhaps it wasn't quite fair—but then I didn't think. I wonder why he's never been to see me."

"Can't say, Molly."

"He must have seen the fire in the papers —I hope he didn't think what you did. I mean—think——"

"What?"

"Think that I cared."

"Don't, Molly, for God's sake! I never

thought it. I was in an infernal bad temper, that was all."

"So that hasn't made any difference?"

"Of course it hasn't."

"Nothing can make any difference now then, can it?"

It was too much. He got up and walked up and down the room. Poor Mrs. Nevill Tyson, she had put his idea into words. She had suggested that there was a difference, and suggestion is a fatal thing to an unsteady mind. In that moment of fearful introspection he said to himself that it was all very well for her to say there was no difference. There was a difference. She was not exactly lying on a bed of roses; but in the nature of things her lot was easier than his. There was no comparison between the man's case and the woman's. He had not sunk into that serene apathy which is nine-tenths of a woman's virtue. He was not an invalid—neither was he a saint. It is not necessary to be a saint in order to be a martyr; poor devils have their martyrdom. Why could not women

realize these simple facts? Why would they persist in believing the impossible?

His face was very red when he turned round and answered. "I can't talk about it, Molly. God knows what I feel."

This was the way he helped to support that little fiction of the man of deep and strong emotions, frost-bound in an implacable reserve.

He took up the book again, and she fell asleep at the sound of the reading. He sat and watched her.

Straight and still in her white draperies, she lay like a dead woman. Some trick of the shaded lamplight, falling on her face, exaggerated its pallor and discoloration. He was fascinated by the very horror of it; as he stared at her face it seemed to expand, to grow vague and insubstantial, till his strained gaze relaxed and shifted, making it start into relief again. He watched it swimming in and out of a liquid dusk of vision, till the sight of it became almost a malady of the nerves. And as she saw it now he would see

it all the days of his life. He felt like the living captive bound to the dead in some infernal triumph of Fate. Dead and not dead—that was the horrible thing. Beneath that mask that was not Molly, Molly was alive. She would live, she would be young when he was long past middle age.

He found it in him to think bitterly of the little thing for the courage that had saved his life—for that. Of all her rash and inconsiderate actions this was the worst. Courage had never formed part of his feminine ideal; it was the glory of the brute and the man, and she should have left it to men and to brutes like him. And yet if that detestable "accident," as she called it, had happened to him, she would have loved him all the better for it.

Odd. But some women are made so. Marion Hathaway was that sort—she stuck like a leech.

And now—the frivolous, feather-headed little wife, whom he had held so cheap and wronged so lightly, urging her folly as almost

a justification of the wrong, she too— She appalled him with the terrific eternity of her love. Was it possible that this feeling, which he had despised as the blind craving and clinging of the feminine animal, could take a place among the supreme realities, the things more living than flesh and blood, which in his way he still contrived to believe in? The idea made him extremely uncomfortable, and he put it from him. He had drifted into that stagnant backwater of the soul where the scum of thought rises to the surface. Molly was better than most women; but, poor little thing, there was nothing transcendent about her virtues. She loved him after the manner of her kind.

No—no—no. She loved him as no other woman had ever loved him before. She loved him because she believed in him against the evidence of her senses. If she only knew! A diabolical impulse seized him to awaken her then and there and force her to listen to a full confession of his iniquities, without reticence and without apology. Surely no

woman's love could stand before that appalling revelation? But no; what other women would do he would not undertake to say; *she* would only look at him with her innocent eyes, reiterating "It makes no difference."

Would he have cared more if she had cared less? On the whole—no. And what if she had been a woman of a higher, austerer type? That woman would have repelled him, thrown him back upon himself. She had drawn him by her very foolishness. He had been brought back to her, again and again, by the certainty of her unreasoning affection. By its purity also. That had saved him from falling lower than a certain dimly defined level. If there was a spark of good in him he owed it to her. He had never sunk so low as in that intolerable moment when he had doubted her. For the behavior of the brute is low enough in all conscience; but below that is the behavior of the cad. Tyson had his own curious code of morals.

Yes; and in the raw enthusiasm of remorse he had made all manner of vows and prom-

ises, and he felt bound in honor to keep them. He had talked of a rupture with the past. A rupture with the past! You might as well talk of breaking with your own shadow. The shadow of your past. Imbecile expression! The past was in his blood and nerves; it was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. It was he. Or rather it was this body of his that seemed to live with a hideous independent life of its own. And yet, even yet, there were moments when he caught a glimpse of his better self struggling as if under the slough of dissolution; the soul that had never seen the sun was writhing to leap into the light. He would have given the whole world to be able to love Molly. There was no death and no corruption like the death of love; and the spirit of his passion had been too feeble to survive its divorce from the flesh.

He could not look away. He rose and lifted the lamp-shade, throwing the pitiless light on the thing that fascinated him. She stirred in her sleep, turning a little from the light. He bent over her pillow and peered into her

face. She woke suddenly, as if his gaze had drawn her from sleep; and from the look in her eyes he judged a little of the horror his own must have betrayed.

He shrank back guiltily, replaced the shade, and sat down in the chair at the foot of the bed. She looked at him. His whole frame trembled; his eyes were blurred with tears; the parted lips drooped with weakness, bitterness, and unappeased desire. Did she know that in that moment the hunger and thirst after righteousness raged more fiercely than any earthly appetite? It seemed to him that in her look he read pity and perfect comprehension. He hid his face in his hands.

After that night he began to have a nervous dread of going into her room. He was always afraid that she would "say something." By this time his senses, too, were morbidly acute. The sight and smell of drugs, dressings, and disinfectants afflicted him with an agony of sensation. There was no escaping these things in the little flat, and he could not help associating his wife with them: it seemed

as if a crowd of trivial and sordid images was blotting out the delicate moral impressions he had once had. Tyson was paying the penalty of having lived the life of the senses; his brain had become their servant, and he was horrified to find that he could not command its finest faculties at pleasure.

There was no disguising the detestable truth. He could attain no further. From those heights of beautiful emotion where he had disported himself lately there could be no gradual lapse into indifference. It was a furious break-neck descent to the abominable end—repulsion and infinite dislike, tempered at first by a little remnant of pity. Every day her presence was becoming more intolerable to him. But, for the few moments that he perforce spent with her, he was more elaborately attentive than ever. As his tenderness declined his manner became more scrupulously respectful. (She would have given anything to have heard him say "You little fool," as in the careless days of the old life.) He had no illusions left. Not even to

himself could he continue that pleasant fiction of the strong man with feelings too deep for utterance. Still, there were certain delicacies: if his love was dead he must do his best to bury it decently—anyhow, anywhere, out of his sight and hers.

He noticed now that, as he carried her from one room to the other, she turned her face from his, as she had turned it from the light.

And she was growing stronger.

One afternoon she heard the doctor talking to Nevill in the passage. He uttered the word "change."

"Shall I send her to Bournemouth?" said Nevill.

"Yes, yes. Good-morning. Or, better still, take her yourself to the Riviera," sang out the doctor.

The door closed behind the eminent man, and Tyson went out immediately afterwards.

He came home late that night, and she did not see him till the afternoon of the following

day, when he turned into the dining-room on his way out of the house. He was nervously polite, and apologized for having an appointment. She noticed that he looked tired and ill; but there was another look in his face that robbed it of the pathos of illness, and she saw that too.

"Nevill," said she, "I wish you'd go away for a bit."

"Where do you want me to go to?"

"Oh, anywhere." She considered a moment. "You'll be ill if you stop here. You ought to go ever so far away. A sea-voyage would be the very thing."

"It wouldn't do me much good to go sea-voyaging by myself."

For a second her face brightened. "No —but—I shall be quite strong in another fortnight—and then—I could go out to you wherever you were, and we could come back together, couldn't we?"

There was no answer.

"You might go—to please me."

He laughed shortly. "I might go to please

myself. But what's the good of talking about it when you know I can't."

"Well, if you'd rather wait, there's the Riviera"—he colored violently—"would that do for you?"

"Yes; I think it *would* 'do' for me—just about."

"Well—anywhere then. If I'm well enough to go to the Riviera, I'm——"

"You're not well enough to go to the Riviera."

"What makes you think that?" she asked gravely.

He looked away and muttered something about "Thompson," and "the journey." Again that look of agonized comprehension!

She said nothing. She knew that he had lied. Ah, to what pitiful shifts she had driven him!

He hurried off to his appointment, and she lay on her couch by the window with clenched hands and closed eyelids. She had no sensations to speak of; but thought came to her—confused, overwhelming thought—an agony

of ideas. She loved him. Ah, the shame of it! And that hidden hope of hers became a terror. Mrs. Nevill Tyson's soul was struggling with its immortality. The hot flare of summer was in the streets and in the room; the old life was surging everywhere around her; above the brutal roar and gust of it, blown from airy squares, flung back from throbbing thoroughfares, she caught responsive voices, rhythmic, inarticulate murmurs, ripples of the resonant joy of the world. Down there, in their dim greenery, the very plane-trees were whispering together under the shadow of the great flats.

What were these things to Mrs. Nevill Tyson? She had entered the New Life, as you enter heaven, alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MIRACLE

In the afternoon of the following day Tyson was sitting with Molly in the dining-room when he was told that Captain Stanistreet had called and had asked to see him. "Was he——?" Yes, the Captain was in the drawing-room. Tyson was a little surprised at the announcement; for though the shock of the fire had somewhat obscured his recollection of the events that preceded it, Molly had unfortunately recalled them to his memory. But he had clean forgotten some of the details. Consequently he was more than a little surprised when Stanistreet, without any greeting or formality whatsoever, took two letters from his pocket and flung one of them on the window-seat.

"That's your letter," he said. "And here's the answer."

He laid Molly's little note down beside it.

Tyson stared at the letters rather stupidly. That correspondence was one of the details he had forgotten. He also stared at Stanistreet, who looked horribly ill. Then he took up Molly's note and examined it without reading a word. It was crumpled, dirty, almost illegible, as if Louis had thrust it violently into his pocket, and carried it about with him for weeks.

"If you really don't know what it means," said Stanistreet, "I'll tell you. It means that your wife had only one idea in her head. She didn't understand it in the least, but she stuck to it. She thought of it from morning till night, when other women would have been amusing themselves; thought of it ever since you married her and left her. Unfortunately, it kept her from thinking much of anything else. There were many things she might have thought of—she might have thought of *me*. But she didn't."

"Thanks. I know that as well as you. Did it ever occur to you to think of her?"

"I shouldn't be here if I hadn't thought of her."

"Oh——" Tyson stepped over to the empty fireplace. It was the only thing in the room that was left intact.

His attitude suggested that he was lord of the hearth, and that his position was indestructible.

"Since you considered your testimony to my wife's character so indispensable, may I ask why you waited five weeks to give it?"

Tyson could play with words like a man of letters; he fought with them like the City tailor's son.

"You post your letters rather late. I left town an hour after I got hers."

"It was the least you could do."

"Then I got ill. That also was the least I could do. But I did my best to die too, for decency's sake. Needless to say, I did not succeed."

"I see. You thought of yourself first, and of her afterwards. What I want to know is,

would you have thought of me, supposing—only supposing—you could have taken advantage of the situation?"

"No. In that case I would not have thought of you. I would have thought of her."

"In other words, you would have behaved like a scoundrel if you'd got the chance." The twinkle in Tyson's eyes intimated that he was enjoying himself immensely. He had never had the whip-hand of Stanistreet before.

"I would have behaved like a damned scoundrel, if you like. But I wouldn't have left her. Not even to marry and live morally ever after. I can be faithful—to another man's wife."

The twinkle went out like a spark, and Tyson looked at his hearth. It was dangerous to irritate Stanistreet, for there was no end to the things he knew. So he only said, "Do you mind not shouting quite so loud. She's in there—she may hear you."

She had heard him; she was calling to

Nevill. He went to her, leaving the door of communication unlatched.

"Is that Louis?" she asked. Tyson muttered something which Stanistreet could not hear, and Molly answered with an intense pleading note that carried far. "But I *must* see him."

He started forward at the sound of her voice. I believe up to the very last he clung to the doubt that was his hope. But Tyson had heard the movement and he shut the door.

The pleading and muttering went on again on the other side. Heaven only knew what incriminating things the little fool was saying in there! As Stanistreet waited, walking up and down the empty room, he noticed for the first time that it *was* empty. Only the other day it had been crammed with things that were symbols or monuments of the foolishness of Mrs. Nevill Tyson. Now ceiling and walls were foul with smoke, the gay white paint was branded and blistered, and the floor he walked on was cleared as if for a dance of devils. But it was nothing to Stanistreet.

It would have been nothing to him if he had found Mrs. Nevill Tyson's drawing-room utterly consumed. There was no reality for him but his own lust, and anger, and bitterness, and his idea of Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

Presently Tyson came back.

"You can go in," he said, "but keep quiet, for God's sake!"

Stanistreet went in.

Tyson looked back; he saw him stop halfway from the threshold.

It was only for a second, but to Stanistreet it seemed eternity. From all eternity Mrs. Nevill Tyson had been lying there on that couch, against those scarlet cushions, with the blinds up and the sun shining full on her small, scarred face, and on her shrunken, tortured throat.

She held out her hand and said, "I thought it was you. I wanted to see you. Can you find a chair?"

He murmured something absolutely trivial and sat down by her couch, playing with the fringe of the shawl that covered her.

"Did I hear you say you had been ill?" she asked.

He leant forward, bending his head low over the fringe; she could not see his face. "I had inflammation of something or other, and I went partially off my head—got out of bed and walked about in an east wind with a temperature of a hundred and two, decimal point nine."

"Oh, Louis, how wicked of you! You might have died!"

"No such luck."

"For shame! I've been ill too; did you know? Of course you didn't, or else you'd have come to ask how I was, wouldn't you? No, you wouldn't. How could you come when you were ill?"

"I would have come. I didn't know."

"Didn't you? Oh, well—we had a fire here, and I was burnt; that's all. How funny you not knowing, though. It was in all the papers—'Heroic conduct of a lady.' Aren't they silly, those people that write papers. I wasn't heroic a bit."

"I—I never saw it. I was in Paris."

"In Paris? Ah, I love Paris! That's where I went for my honeymoon. Was that where you were ill?"

"Yes."

"Poor Louis! And I was so happy there."

Poor Louis!—she had loved Nevill in him and he was still a part of Nevill. And for the rest, she who understood so much, who was she to judge him?

He looked at her. By this time his sensations had lost the sting of pity and horror. He could look without flinching. The fire had only burnt the lower frame-work of the face, leaving the features untouched; the eyes still glowed under their scorched brows with a look half-tender, half-triumphant.

It was as if they said, "See what it was you loved so much."

The little fool, tortured into wisdom, was that what she meant? It was always hard to fathom her meanings. Could it be that?

Yes, it must be. She had sent for him, not

because she wanted to see him, but because she wanted him to see her. She had sent for him to save him. The sight of her face had killed her husband's love; she had supposed that it would do the same kind office for his. Would any other woman have thought of it? It was preposterous, of course; but it would not have been Mrs. Nevill Tyson's idea without some touch of divine absurdity.

But—could any other woman have done it? "See what it was you loved so much." Poor little fool!

And he saw. This was not Mrs. Nevill Tyson, but it was the woman that he had loved. Her being Mrs. Nevill Tyson was an accident; it had nothing to do with *her*. Her beauty too? It was gone. So was something that had obscured his judgment of her. He had doubted her over and over again, unwillingly at first, willfully at the end; but he knew now that if for one instant she had justified his skepticism he would have ceased to love her. It was the paradox of her purity, dimly

discerned under all his doubt, that had tormented and fascinated him; and she held him by it still.

His fingers worked nervously, plaiting and unplaiting the fringe.

"You were burnt. Where was Nevill then?"

"He was here."

"Was *he* burnt?"

"No; but he might have been. He—he helped to put the fire out. Oh, Louis, it's horribly hard on him!"

Stanistreet clenched his teeth lest he should blaspheme.

"How long have you known Nevill?" she asked, as if she had read his thoughts.

"I don't know. A long time——"

"How many years? Think."

"Fifteen perhaps. We were at Marlborough together in seventy-eight."

"You've known him twenty years then. And you have known me—three?"

"Four, Molly—four next September."

"Well, four then. It isn't a long time.

And you see it wasn't enough to know me in, was it?"

He said nothing; but the fringe dropped from his fingers.

"You were Nevill's best friend too, weren't you?"

"Yes. His best friend, and his worst, God help me!"

"I suppose that means you've quarreled with him? I thought I heard you. But, of course, you didn't know."

"Forgive me, I did not." He had misunderstood her—again!

"Well, you know now. I wasn't worth quarreling about, was I?"

He got up and leaned out of the window, looking into the dull street that roared seventy feet below. Then he sighed; and whether it was a sigh of relief or pain he could not tell.

Neither did Mrs. Nevill Tyson in her great wisdom know.

CHAPTER XIX

CONFESSIONAL

After all, Tyson was the first to make up the quarrel. If a sense of justice was wanting in him it was supplied by a sense of humor, and he was very soon conscious of something ridiculous in his attitude towards Stanistreet. He had law and nature on his side for once, but in the eyes of the humorist, or of impartial justice, there was not very much to choose between them. In fact the advantage was on Stanistreet's side. He, Tyson, had thrown his wife and Stanistreet together from the first, he had exposed her to what, in his view, would have been sharp temptation to nine women out of ten, and she had not wronged him by a single thought. As for Stanistreet, he had not taken, or even attempted to take, the chance he gave him.

His tolerance showed how far he had sepa-

rated himself from her. A month ago he would not have thought so lightly of the matter.

One evening, not long after their stormy interview, he turned up at Stanistreet's rooms in Chelsea, much as he had turned up at Ridgmount Gardens after his year's absence.

Stanistreet was lying back in a low chair, smoking and thinking. The change in Louis's appearance was still more striking than when they had last met. His clothes hung loosely on him; his whole figure had a drooping, disjointed look. But the restless light had gone from his eyes; the muscles of his lean face were set in a curious repose, as if the man's nature were appeased, as if his will had somehow resisted the physical collapse. He rose reluctantly as Tyson came in, and stood, manifestly ill at ease, while Tyson, ignoring the interrogation of his air, took possession of a seat which was not offered to him.

"Look here, Stanistreet," said he, "I can't stand this any longer. You and I can't afford

to quarrel—about a woman. It's not worth it."

"That is precisely what your wife said. But it's not the way I should put it myself. We did quarrel; and you at least had every provocation."

"Oh, damn the provocation. You don't suppose I came here to make you apologize?"

"I'm not going to apologize. When I say you had provocation enough to justify your putting a bullet into me, I'm merely stating the conventional view."

"Well—yes. If I hit you hard, it was all above the belt."

"There are some vulnerable parts above the belt, though you mightn't think it."

"If it comes to that, Stanny, I must say you got your revenge. Trust an old friend for knowing where to hit. That fist of yours caught me in some very nasty places. Suppose we shake hands."

They shook hands. Stanistreet's hand was cold as ice. He lowered himself into his chair, and lit a pipe in token of reconciliation.

He was magnanimous. It was he who had done the wrong, and it was he who had pardoned. He had always been sorry for that poor devil, Tyson.

Tyson was aware of this feeling, and he generally resented it; but at times like the present it gave him a curious sense of moral support.

The two men sat and smoked in a silence which Tyson, as usual, was the first to break.

"I wouldn't like to swear," said he, "that I don't go abroad again before long. It's my only chance. I'm knocked out of the game here. It's too quick, too hard, and the rules are too cursedly complicated."

"All the same, I'd wait a bit before I flung it up, if I were you."

"Wait? Wait? I've done nothing but wait ever since I came to this detestable country, and my chance never turned up. It never will turn up—here."

"Why not?"

"My own fault, I suppose. I've spent my life in going round and round the earth pas-

sionately in a circle. I don't say that perpetual rotation is a natural function of the ordinary human being; but it's my function —I'm good for nothing else. And they expect a man with the world in his brain and the devil in his blood to live decently in this damnable city of fog and filth! And when the world-madness comes on him nobody knows anything about this particular form of mania—the poor wretch must get into a stiff shirt or a strait waistcoat and converse sanely with that innocent woman, his wife. If he doesn't there's a scandal, and the devil to pay——"

Stanistreet looked grave. Whither was all this tending? To a final abandonment of Mrs. Nevill Tyson?

"Of course, the mistake was to try. There might have been a chance for me if I'd had a tithe of your sense. But being what I am, I must needs go and marry. It was the deed of a lunatic."

"Isn't it rather late to go back on that now? What's the good?"

"None, you fool, none. And if there's anything that stamps a man as a cur and a cad, it's this vile habit of slanging the women for his own sins. All the same—I'm not blaming anybody but myself, mind—all the same, I being what I am, there's no doubt I married the wrong sort of woman. I don't mind making that confession to you. I believe you know more about me than anybody, barring my Maker."

Stanistreet looked straight in front of him, terribly detached and stern.

"She was not the wrong sort," he said slowly; "but she may have been the wrong woman for you."

"Men like you and me, Stanistreet, contrive to get hold of the wrong woman; I don't know why."

"You must know that your marriage did nothing for you that was not very well done before."

"Yes. It seems to me that there was a time when I had an immortal soul. That

was before the Framley episode. You remember? An edifying experience."

Stanistreet assented. He knew the horrible story, of a mad boy and a bad woman. Perhaps it accounted for the ugliest facts in Tyson's character. He was warped from his youth, the bitter, premature manhood, so soon corrupt.

"That woman was possessed of seven distinct devils, and amongst them they didn't leave much of my immortal soul. And you hear men talk of their 'first love.' Good God!"

Stanistreet shrugged his shoulders. He had not met these men. But there could be no doubt that if any of Tyson's loves could be called his first, he would have talked freely enough about it. No subject was too sacred or too vile for his unbridled tongue. He continued to talk.

"After all, at my worst, I never did as much harm to any woman as that Framley fiend did to me. I suppose I had my revenge; but that was Nature's justice, not mine.

Right or wrong, I obeyed the law of the cosmos. And for the life of me I don't see why I should bother about it."

If it had not been for Mrs. Nevill Tyson, Stanistreet might have been faintly amused at the idea of this little cockney cosmopolitan persuading himself that his contemptible vices were part of the pageant of the world. As it was he was disgusted. He, too, was a sinner in all conscience; but his sins and his repentance had been alike simple and sincere. He had none of the pendantry of vice.

"If you ask me," he said, "what did for you was that low trick of the old man Tyson when he left you his respectability. A property you really could not be expected to manage. *That* was your ruin, if you like."

Tyson looked up. His drowning conscience snatched at straws. "It was. I've thought as much myself. But that doesn't square my account. I lied when I said my marriage was a mistake. It was not a mistake. It was

a crime committed against the dearest, sweetest woman that ever lived."

"You mean——?" It was hard to tell what Tyson meant when he went off into reminiscences. And for the moment Stanistreet's vision was obscured by a painful memory. Three years ago a woman had come to his rooms and asked for Tyson. She sat in that chair opposite—where Tyson was sitting now. She said unspeakable things that were by no means pleasant for Stanistreet to hear. It had required all his tact to break the news of Tyson's marriage and take her home in a cab. He could see her now, in her pitiful finery, sitting back, trying to hide her white face with gloves that were anything but white.

But Tyson was not thinking of Mrs. Hathaway.

"I mean that baby—Molly—my wife. That was the wickedest, cruellest thing I ever did in the whole course of my abominable life. I might have known how it would end."

Stanistreet looked thoughtfully at his friend. He was used to these outbursts of self-reproach, but they had never moved him greatly until now.

"They told me I ought to have married a clever woman. *She* wasn't clever, thank God! Yet somehow she had a sort of originality—I don't know what it was." (Tyson had lately fallen into the habit of talking about his wife in the past tense, as if she were dead.) "It was something that no clever woman ever has. *I* know them! Upon my soul I do believe I loved her." He paused, pondering. "I wonder how it would have answered though if I'd married a thing with more brains?"

"Brains? They're damnation. Are you thinking of Miss Batchelor?"

"N-no. There *is* a medium. A woman needn't be a fool or a philosopher, nor yet a saint or a devil. It exists somewhere, that golden mean."

"Oh, no doubt."

"It's odd how that notion of the perfect

woman sticks to you. How the devil did I get hold of it, I wonder?"

Stanistreet made no answer. It was sufficiently evident that Tyson had got it from his wife. The odd thing was that Tyson was unaware of this. He seemed to have no doubt whatever that his marriage with the perfect woman had been arranged for in heaven, though somehow it had failed to come off on earth. A delusion not uncommon with men of Tyson's stamp.

"I believe," said Tyson, "it's a what d'ye call 'em—category—innate idea—*a priori* form of the masculine intelligence. I've never seen a man yet who hadn't it somewhere about him. And I've seen most sorts. Terrific bounders, too, some of them."

A year ago Stanistreet would have laughed at this, now he smiled.

Tyson lay back in his chair and fell into a waking dream. He spoke slowly, in the curious muffled voice of the dreamer. "The perfect woman—the eternal, incomprehensible divinity, all-wise, all-good, all-loving, the

guardian of the soul—I believe in it, I adore it; but, unfortunately, I have never met it."

"My dear Tyson, I doubt if you and I would know it if we did meet it."

Tyson said nothing. He had closed his eyelids. He was following his dream.

Presently he spoke.

"I say, Stanistreet, do you believe in miracles?"

Stanistreet looked down. Only the other day he had seen a miracle and believed. And he himself was a greater miracle than the one he saw. But the experience was not one that he cared to talk about.

"They don't happen here, where people are so damned clever. But I know that they happen—sometimes—over there—in the East —*ex oriente lux.*"

He rose. "Some day I shall go there or thereabouts, and see."

"And leave your wife here?"

"That's it. Do you think I ought to go?"

"I think it doesn't matter in the very least."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that whether you go or stay you'll kill her. But go, for God's sake! It's the kindest way."

CHAPTER XX

A MAN AND A SPHINX

THE idea of leaving England had occurred to Tyson more than once before. In Stanistreet's rooms it took its first vague shape. But Louis's parting words had a sting in them; they were at once a shock to his feelings and a challenge to his will.

Stanistreet had read him thoroughly. In plain language he had entertained serious thoughts of deserting Mrs. Nevill Tyson. Desertion? It was an ugly word. He dismissed his idea. He would dree his weird. He wasn't going to funk the thing—not he! The New Life had been found impossible. No matter. *Certum quia impossibile.* Nothing like a big thumping paradox when you were about it. Impossibility had the smile and lure of haunting deity, the glamor of the

arcana. That night he dedicated himself with more promises and vows.

He was in that state of mind when men look out for miracles to save them. There was no reason why miracles should not happen, here and now. Those fellows must have been in a bad way who had to go out into deserts and places to find God and their unconquerable souls. No doubt queer things have happened in Africa, in Asia, things which the Western mind—— Pending the miracle, his Western mind would seek peace in an office. He would try anything, from a Government appointment to a clerkship in the Bank. After all they do not manage things so very differently in the East. If you come to think of it, there is not much to choose between bending yourself double over a desk and sitting with your head in the pit of your stomach, meditating on Brahma. The effect on the liver must be pretty much the same.

He went to bed thinking of Upanishads,

with the result that he dreamed of tiger-shooting in the jungle.

Ah, yes, in the cold light of intellect, between doing and not doing a thing there is but the difference of a word. That colorless negative does nothing to alter the salient image of the thing. The fervency of his resolve not to leave England called up as in a calenture the lands that he was not to travel, the freedom that was not to be his.

The idea he had dismissed came back to him. He flew and it followed; he veered and it waylaid him at every turn. An intolerable restlessness took possession of him. He spent his days and a great part of his nights in furious walking about the streets. The idea hounded him on; it stared at him now from newspaper placards, it was whispered and murmured and shrieked into his ears.

There was war in the Soudan.

He saw his idea illuminated, transfigured. It was Glory, a stern wingless Victory, beckoning him across a continent. It no longer pursued him. It had changed its tactics. It

was coming to meet him; there was no escaping.

He met it face to face on the Embankment somewhere between Charing Cross and the Temple. A light fog had set in from the river, blurring the outlines of things. He had been walking up and down for about an hour, walking for walking's sake, with his eyes fixed on the pavement. Suddenly he found himself standing still, staring at one of the sphinxes that guard Cleopatra's Needle. The monster rose up out of the fog as out of a sea; its body glistened with an oily sooty moisture, a big drop had gathered in one of its huge eyelids like a tear.

Obelisk and sphinx—what were they doing by this gray river, under this gray sky? They were exiles here, they belonged to the Desert. So did he.

To leave London to its mob of journalists and stock-brokers, and to the demons of the pavement; to go there where there are none of these things, where miracles are sometimes allowed to happen; where God and Nature

are more, not less, than man, and where courage, even in these days, counts as a virtue. If, indeed, as sometimes he feared, the brute in him was supreme and indestructible, London was not the place for him.

London! Every stone of its pavement marked the grave of a human soul.

But he would still be good for something out there. There were things there that wanted doing; things that he could do; things that men died in doing.

Reason said: Why not go and do them? And if he died? Well, what can a man do more than die for his country?

And if Molly died?

Molly would not die. Something told him that. But he might break her heart if he went. Yes; and he would certainly break his promises if he stayed. Stanistreet was right there.

Her words came back to him: "It's all over and done with now." Was it? Was it?

Reason said: It was better to risk a possibility than face a certainty.

Reason? Ah, no! It was Nature rather, the inscrutable Sphinx, repeating her stale old riddle, the answer to which is Man.

A sound of laughter roused him from his communings with Reason.

The lights were going up one by one along the Embankment. In an embrasure of the parapet a woman was leaning back against the low wall; she was looking at him, and laughing open-mouthed. She stood near a gas-standard, on the outer edge of an illuminated disc. Her face, painted and powdered, flushed faintly in the perishing light. He thought her magnificently beautiful.

He came forward and was about to speak to her. The woman moved quickly into the bright center of the disc; she turned her face sideways as she moved, and he saw in it a sudden likeness to Molly. The likeness was fugitive, indefinable; something in the coloring, the line of the forehead, the sweep of the black hair from the cheek; it might have been a trick of the gaslight or of his own brain. But it was there; he saw it, an in-

fernal reincarnation of his wife's dead beauty.

And as he swerved out of her path the woman's laughter went after him, with a ring in it of irony and triumph.

CHAPTER XXI

OUT OF THE NIGHT

THAT evening as he sat in his wife's bedroom—the perfunctory sitting, lasting usually about a quarter of an hour—the thought took complete possession of him. What if he went out to the Soudan? Other fellows were going; they could never have too many. Men dropped off there faster than their places could be filled. And if he died, as other fellows died? Well, death was the supreme Artist's god from the machine, the simplest solution of all tragic difficulties.

A gentle elegiac mood stole over him. He looked on at his own death; he saw the grave dug hastily in the hot sand; he heard the roll of the Dead March, and the rattling of the rifles. In all probability these details would be omitted, but they helped to glorify the dream. He was a mourner at his own

funeral, indifferent to all around him, yet voluptuously moved. So violently did the hero and the sentimentalist unite in that strange composite being that was Nevill Tyson.

He drew his chair a little nearer to her bed. "Molly—supposing I wanted to go abroad again some of these days, would you very much mind?"

There was a slight quivering of the limbs under the bedclothes, but Mrs. Nevill Tyson said nothing.

"You see, going back to Thorneytoft is out of the question for you and me. I think we made the place a bit too hot to hold us. And you hate it, don't you?"

She murmured some assent.

"And if I stick here doing nothing I shan't be able to stand things much longer; I feel as if I should go off my head. I oughtn't to be doing nothing, a great hulking fellow like me."

"No, no; it would never do. But why must you go—abroad? Aren't there things——"

He felt that his only chance was to throw himself as it were naked on her sympathy. "I must go—sooner or later. I can't settle —never could. Traveling is in my blood and in my brain. I'm home-sick, Molly—home-sick for foreign countries, that's all. I shall come back again. You don't think I want to leave you, surely?"

He looked into her eyes; there was no reproach there, only melancholy intelligence. She knew the things that are impossible.

"No. I think you'd rather stay with me—if you could. When shall you go?"

He turned aside. "I don't know. I mayn't go at all. I don't want to talk about it any more."

It was hopeless to talk about it.

He had found his men, fifty brave fellows in all, ordered his outfit and booked his passage, before he could make up his mind to break the news to her, for there was the risk of breaking her heart too.

And now it wanted but two days before his departure.

Coming out of the War Office he met Stanistreet. They walked together as far as Charing Cross.

"Yes," said Tyson, "the thing's done now. I'm off to the Soudan with fifty other fellows —glorious devils—and we mean fighting this time. It's the old field, you see, and the old enemy."

"When do you sail?"

"Wednesday—midnight. See me off?"

"Yes. It's the least I can do."

"Thanks, Stanny." He made a cut at the air with his walking-stick. "Don't you wish you'd half my luck? You poor devils never get a chance. By Jove! if I'd only stuck to *mine!*"

They parted. Not a word of his wife.

Stanistreet looked back over his shoulder as Tyson crossed Trafalgar Square with the bold swinging step of a free man. He was still cutting the air.

The packing was the worst of it. It had to be done in silence and a guilty secrecy, for Molly was in bed again, suffering from a

sort of nervous relapse. Up to the last day Tyson was wretched, haunted by the fear of some unforeseen calamity that might still happen and destroy his plans. By way of guarding against it he had stuck the Steamship Company's labels on all his luggage long ago. That seemed to make his decision irrevocable whatever happened. But he would not be safe till he felt water under him.

At the last minute Molly took a feverish turn, and was on no account to be agitated. If he must go it would be better not to say Good-bye. Oh, much better.

He went into her room. She was drowsy. Her small forehead was furrowed with much thinking; there was a deep flush on her cheek, and her breath came and went like sighing. He stooped over her and whispered "Good-night," the same as any other night. No, not quite the same, for Molly started and trembled. He had kissed not her hands only, but her mouth and her face.

His ship sailed at midnight, and he sailed

with it. She had not stood in his way, the little thing. When, indeed, had she ever hindered him?

Towards midnight Mrs. Wilcox and the servants were startled from their sleep by hearing Mrs. Nevill Tyson calling "Nevill, Nevill!" They hurried to her room; her bed was empty; the clothes were all rumpled back as if flung off suddenly. They looked into the charred, dismantled drawing-room, she was not there; but the door of communication, always kept shut at night, was ajar. She must have gone through into the dining-room. They found her there, stretched across the couch, unconscious. The cord that had held Nevill's sword to the nail above was lying on the floor where she had found it. She had divined his destiny.

The next day she was slightly delirious. The doctors and nurses came and went softly, and Mrs. Wilcox brooded over the sick-room like a vast hope. They listened now and then. She was talking about the baby, the baby that died two years ago.

"It's very strange," said Mrs. Wilcox, "she never took much notice of the little thing when it was alive."

The doctor said nothing to that; but he asked whether her father had not died of consumption. He certainly had; but nobody had ever been afraid for Molly; her lungs were always particularly strong. Yes, but the lungs were not always attacked. Tuberculosis, like other things, follows the line of least resistance. Her brain could never have been very strong.—"Her brain was as strong as yours or mine, sir. You don't know; she has had a miserable life."—Ah, any shock or strong excitement, or any great drain on the system, was enough to bring on brain fever.

In other words, what could you expect after so much agony, so much thinking, and the striving of that life within her life, the hope that would have renewed the world for her—the fruit of three days and three nights of happiness? It was a grave case, but—oh yes, while there was life there was hope.

So they talked. But she was far away

from them, lost in her dream. And in her dream the dead child and the unborn child were one.

By night the tumult in her brain was raging like a fire. She had bad dreams. They were full of noises. First, the hiss of a thin voice singing from a great distance an insistent, intolerable song; then the roar of hell, and the hissing of a thousand snakes of flame. And now a crowd of evil faces pressed on her; they sprang up quick out of the darkness, and then they left her alone. She was outside in the streets. It was twilight, a dreadful twilight; and perhaps it was only a dream, for it is always twilight in dreams. She was all in white, in her night-gown, and it was open at the neck too. She clutched at it to hide—what was it she wanted to hide? She had forgotten—forgotten.

But that was nothing, only a dream, and she was awake now. It was light; it was broad daylight. Then why was she out here, in the street, in her night-gown? She must hide herself—anywhere—down that dark

alley, quick! No, not there—there was a bundle—a dead baby.

No, no, she knew all about it now; there was a fire, and she had got up out of her bed to save some one—to save—"Nevill! Nevill!" She must run or she would be late. Ah, the crowd again, and those faces—all looking at her and wondering. They were running too, they were hunting her down, the brutes, driving her before them with pitchforks. The shame of it, the shame of it! Who was singing that hideous song? It was about her, What had she done? She had done nothing—nothing. She was bearing the sins of all women, the sins of the whole world. It was swords now—sharp burning swords, and they hurt her back—her head—Nevill!

The dream changed. Mrs. Nevill Tyson was wandering about somewhere alone, always alone; she was walking over sand, hot like the floor of a furnace, on and on, a terribly long way, towards something black that lay on the very edge of the world and was

now a cloud, and now a cloak, and now a dead man.

Two people were talking about her now, and there was no sense in what they said.

"Is there *no* hope?" said one.

"None," said the other, "none."

There was a sound of some one crying; it seemed to last a long time, but it was so faint she could scarcely hear it.

"It is just as well. She would have died in child-birth, or lost her reason."

The crying sounded very far away.

It ceased. The sand drifted and fell from under her feet; she was sinking into a whirlpool, sucked down by a great spinning darkness and by an icy wind. She threw up her arms above her head like a dreamer awaking from sleep. She had done with fevers and with dreams.

The doctor pushed back the soft fringe of down from her forehead. "Look," he said, "it is like the forehead of a child."

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE DESERT

It was an hour before dawn, and Tyson was kneeling on the floor of his tent, doing something to the body of a sick man. He had turned the narrow place into a temporary ambulance. Dysentery had broken out among his little troop; and wherever there was a reasonable chance of saving a man's life, Tyson carried that man from under the long awning, pitched in the pitiless sunlight where the men swooned and maddened in their sickness, and brought him into his own tent, where as often as not he died. This boy was dying. The air was stifling; but it was better than what they had down there among those close-packed rows, where the poor devils were dying faster than you could bury them—even in the desert, where funeral rites are short. And as he stooped to moisten the boy's lips,

Tyson swore with a great oath: there was no water in the tin basin; the sponge was dry as sand, and caked with blood. His own tongue was like a hot file laid to the roof of his mouth. The heat by night was the heat of the great desert, stretched out like a sheet of slowly cooling iron; and the heat by day was like the fire of the furnace that tried it.

He went out to find water. When they were not interrupted by the enemy, he might be kept at this sort of work for days; if it was not this boy it would be another. The care of at least one-half of his sick and wounded had fallen to Tyson's charge.

Let the Justice that cries out against what men have done for women remember what they have done for men.

The boy died before dawn. And now, what with sickness and much fighting, out of the fifty Tyson had brought out with him there were but twenty sound men.

When he had seen to the burying of his dead, and gone his rounds among the hopelessly dying, Tyson turned to his own affairs.

The mail had come in, and his letters had been forwarded to him overnight from the nearest station. There was one from Stanistreet; it lay unopened on a box of cartridges amongst his other papers. These he began to look over and arrange.

They were curious documents. One was a letter to his wife, imploring her forgiveness. "And yet," he had written, "except for one sin (committed when I was to all intents and purposes insane), and for one mistake, the grossest man ever made, you have nothing to forgive. I swear that I loved you even then; and I shall always love you, as I have never loved—never could love—any other woman. Believe me, I don't say this to justify myself. There would be far more excuse for me if I had been simply incapable of the feeling. As it is, I sinned against the highest, the best part of myself, as much as against you." There was more in the same strain, only less coherent; hurried sentences jotted down in the night, whenever he could snatch a minute from his duty. He must have meant every

word of it at the moment of writing; and yet —this is the curious thing—it was in flat contradiction to certain statements made in the other paper.

This was a long letter to Stanistreet, begun in the form of an irregular diary—a rough account of the march, of the fighting, of the struggle with dysentery, given in the fewest and plainest words possible, with hardly a trace of the writer's natural egotism. The two last sheets were a postscript. They had evidently been written at one short sitting, in sentences that ran into each other, as if the writer had been in passionate haste to deliver himself of all he had to say. The first sentence was a brief self-accusation, what followed was the defense—a sinner's *apologia pro vita sua.* He had behaved like a scoundrel to his wife. To other women too, if you like, but it had been fair fighting with them, brute against beast, an even match. While she—she was not a woman; she was an adorable mixture—two parts child to one part angel. And he, Tyson, had never been

an angel, and it was a long time since he had been a child. That accounted for everything. Barring his marriage, none of his crimes had been committed in cold blood; but he had gone into *that* with his eyes open, knowing himself to be incapable of the feeling women call love. (Of course, there was always the other thing.) But that love of his wife's was something divine—a thing to believe in, not to see. Men were not made to mate with divinities. He ought to have fallen down and worshiped the little thing, not married her. But was it his fault?

That particular crime would never have been committed if he had been left to himself. It was not the will of God; it was that will of the old man Tyson. The whole thing was a cursed handicap from beginning to end. He was strong; but the world and life and destiny were a bit stronger—it was three to one, and two out of the three were women—see? It's always two to one on them. You can't hit out straight from the shoulder when you fight with women, Stanny. If you can

keep 'em going, it's about all. He had nothing to say against Destiny, mind. Destiny fights fair enough (for a woman), and she had fought fair with him. She had picked him up out of the dirt when the scrimmage was hottest, and pitched him into the desert to die. It was better to die out here in the desert cleanly, than to die in the gutter at home. If only he could die fighting!

Now, whatever may be said of this remarkable document, at any rate it bore on the face of it a passionate veracity. But it gave the lie to every word of his letter to his wife. Tyson had dashed it off in hot haste, risen to his work, and then he must have sat down again to write that letter. Taken singly, the three documents were misleading; taken altogether, they formed a masterpiece of autobiography. The self-revelation was lucid and complete; it gave you Tyson the man of no class, Tyson the bundle of paradoxes, British and Bohemian, cosmopolitan and barbarian; the brute with the immortal human soul struggling perpetually to be.

He put the diary into his dispatch-box. It was found there afterwards, and published with a few other letters. Everybody knows that simple straightforward record; it shows Tyson at his bravest and his best. If he had tried to separate the little gold of his life from the dross of it he could not have succeeded better. He looked over the postscript hurriedly. When he came to the words, "Knowing myself to be incapable of the feeling women call love," he compared it with the other letter, "There would have been far more excuse for me if I had been simply incapable of the feeling." The two statements did not exactly tally; but what else could he say? And it was too late to mend it now.

He laid down the sheets and opened Stanistreet's letter. It was short; it gave the news of Molly's death with a few details, and these words: "In any case it must have come soon. Your going away made no difference. It began before you left—the fever was hanging about her; and they say her brain could never have been very strong."

He sat staring at the canvas of the tent till it glowed a purplish crimson against the dawn. The air choked him; it reeked with pestilence and death. O God! the futility of everything he had ever done! The lie he had written was futile; it had come too late. His coming out here was futile; he had come too soon. If he had waited another three weeks he could have gone without breaking Molly's heart. "Her brain could never have been very strong." At that he laughed—horribly, aloud.

The sound of his own laughter drove him from the tent. He went out. As he strained his eyes over the desert, the waste Infinity that had claimed him, he seemed to be brought nearer to the naked sincerity of things. There was no pity for him and no excuse; but neither was there condemnation. He knew himself, and he knew the hour of his redemption. *Ex oriente lux!* It was as if illumination had come with that fierce penetrating dawn that was beating the sand of the desert into fire.

Ah—that was a shot! The outpost stood a hundred yards to the left of him reloading. A black head started up behind a curve of rising ground, a bullet whizzed by, and the man with the musket fell in a little cloud of sand.

And now the bullets were crossing each other in mid-air. The camp was surrounded.

Tyson called up his twenty men and ran to his tent for arms. The papers were still there on the box of cartridges.

He hesitated for a second. He realized with a sudden lucidity that if he died, and those damning documents were found, there would be a slur on his memory out of keeping with the end. He could not have it said that the last words he had written had been an apology and a lie.

He tore the papers across, once, twice—no time for more—and rushed into the desert, his heart beating with the brutal, jubilant lust of battle.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN MEMORIAM

Later on news came of that heroic stand made by Tyson and his men—a mere handful against hundreds of the enemy. He had led them in their last mad rush on a line of naked steel; he had fallen first, face downwards, pierced through the back and breast. He died fighting.

Even in Drayton Parva, where all things are remembered, his sins are forgotten. Nay, more, they forbear to speak of his wife's sins out of respect for the memory of a brave man.

In Drayton Parish Church there is a stained glass window with a figure of St. Michael; he has a drawn sword in his hand and the flames of hell are about his feet. That window is dedicated

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE MEMORY OF NEVILL TYSON.

So they remember.

And out there, in the great Soudan, there is a wooden cross that mounts guard over a long mound. Already it is buried up to its arms in the shifting sand; by to-morrow the dead and their place will be one with the eternal desert. And the desert remembers nothing, neither glory nor sin.

THE END

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